READING COSTUME DESIGN:
THE RISE OF THE COSTUME DESIGNER 1850-1920

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ABSTRACT

Reading Costume Design: the rise of the costume designer 1850-1920

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"Reading Costume Design" identifies and theorizes an important shift in costume practices: in the mid-nineteenth century, it was common for actors to wear their own clothing onstage or to choose a garment from a theatre's generic stock, without coordination with other costumes or attention to the particular demands of a role. By the early twentieth century, however, costume was firmly established as an expressive artistic tool in building a character and shaping the complete theatrical experience, overseen by a professional designer who routinely received credit in the program. By focusing on this specific moment, my dissertation reclaims theatrical costume as an object of theoretical inquiry (a text), while maintaining its place as an object of material culture, fully embedded in a particular historical context. I use the figure of the professional costume designer – and her rising prominence across the performing arts after 1880 – as a lens to focus on the changing relationship between the stage, fashion, and visual culture.

"Reading Costume Design" argues that this historical shift reveals an important change in the status of costumes: from craft to art. At the beginning of my period, costumes impressed audiences as bravura displays of wealth, spectacle, or craftsmanship; by 1920, theatre practitioners and audience members viewed costume as an expressive art form, and its designer as an artist. As art objects, costumes acquired additional semiotic value, conveying new kinds of information to spectators. Designers created costumes for audiences to "look through" – reading costumes not only for their surface beauty or accuracy but also for commentary or reflection upon the text or overall performance. As a

form of expression in their own right, costumes interacted in more collaborative or critical ways with the literary and musical texts.

I contend that in this fertile period, four kinds of artists made key contributions to this expanded expressive model of costume design: performers, directors, couturiers, and painters. I use the term "proto-designer" to denote these artists, who helped to shape the profession of costume design from adjacent fields. Each of my four chapters studies one type of proto-designer, focusing on two or three significant examples. Major figures discussed include Georg II of Saxe-Meinengan, Richard Wagner, Marietta Piccolomini, Ellen Terry, Lucy Duff-Gordon (Lucile), Paul Poiret, Edward Gordon Craig, Leon Bakst, and Pablo Picasso.

"Reading Costume Design" shows how theatrical Modernism established norms of costume design that are still with us today, analyzing the consolidation of costume choices into the hands of one individual (the designer) as part of Modernism's investment in the single artistic consciousness. This project highlights the importance of costume design as an object of study, able to move across different genres within the performing arts (theatre, dance, opera) and to offer fresh perspectives on fields such as theatre history, media and celebrity studies, art history, gender studies, aesthetics, and material culture.

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--Annie Holt

Introduction: Arguing (for) Costumes

In the name of what shall we decide to judge the costumes for a play? One might answer (as whole epochs have done): historical truth or good taste, faithfulness of detail or pleasure of the eye. For my part, I propose another ideal for our ethic: that of the play itself.

--Roland Barthes, "The Diseases of Costume," 1955[1]

In 1929, scenic historians Walter Rene Fuerst and Samuel J. Hume wrote that "an 'historical costume' must never be a literal copy of an illustration found in a document of the period. Here, as in the case of the setting, the copy must be replaced by an interpretation – an interpretation of the general characteristics."[2] Fuerst and Hume's stern injunction highlights the fact that this understanding of costume design as "interpretation" was quite new. This study traces the radical upheaval in costume design across the turn of the nineteenth century, theorizing its shift from an actor-centric free-for-all into what Arnold Aronson has called "a metanarrative,"[3] interpreting and interacting with the performance text(s). Later in his 1955 essay quoted above, Barthes writes that "the costume must be an argument… in all the great periods of theatre, costume had a powerful semantic value; it was not there only to be seen, it was also there to be *read*, it communicated ideas, information, or sentiments."[4] The overall claim of "Reading Costume Design" is that, while costume certainly had "semantic value" in

[1] Roland Barthes, "The Diseases of Costume," *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard. (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 41. Originally published in *Théâtre Populaire,* 1955.
[2] Fuerst, Walter Rene, and Samuel J. Hume, *Twentieth-Century Stage Decoration* (New York, Benjamin Blom, 1929), 82.

[3] Arnold Aronson, "Postmodern Design," *Theatre Journal*, 43:1 (Mar., 1991): 2. Aronson is here discussing Modern scenic design more generally, but his comments certainly apply to costumes specifically.

[4] Barthes, "The Diseases of Costume," 46.

earlier epochs, around the turn of the nineteenth century it began to convey a new *kind* of "ideas, information, or sentiments": information about "the play itself." It is within theatrical Modernism, I argue, that we find the seeds of Barthes' new "ideal" for costume design – that it relate to the overall theatrical experience – an "ethic" which remains with us to this day.

Aoife Monks has explored the "porous relations between actor and costume and audience," theorizing the costume as "a body that can be taken off."[5] Costume design inhabits a conflicted position in the trajectory from the actor-driven theatre of the eighteenth century to the unified director's vision of the early twentieth century. On the one hand, costume is the design element most tied to the body and therefore to the actor, the most "personal" stage value; on the other, creative costume design can be seen as reducing the actor to a mere clothes-hanger, obliterating the body under layers of distorting material and usurping the actor's job of portraying the character. Costume as an expressive or "interpretive" function threatens not only the utility of the actor (if clothes are enough to indicate characterization, what is the actor's job?), but also the play's literary text – nineteenth-century costumes were often accused of overwhelming the playwright. My project grapples with these competing interests by looking at *seams*, at these places where two things abut or overlap – not only body/costume, but also costume/fashion, actor/character, text/scenography, director/designer, art/craft. This dissertation looks both *at* costume and *through* costume,[6] arguing that in this period costumes changed both in surface (the style or aesthetics of the stage garment) and in

[5] Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3;11.

[6] Drawing here on Monks, *The Actor in Costume,* 6, and also on Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

significance (what the audience understood from costumes). To put it another way, "Reading Costume Design" attends both to seams and seeming.

My project reclaims theatrical costume as an object of theoretical inquiry (a text), while maintaining its place as an object of material culture, fully embedded in a particular historical context. Some exciting recent scholarship is beginning to examine costumes as material objects with the power to perform independently. My goal, however, is to excavate the history of these objects and their communicative force, within a particular period. "Reading Costume Design" examines human intention or agency – the authority, art, and creative genesis of the designer – with the understanding that, once created, costumes often have a power or meaning beyond that original intention. Costumes react with bodies, with actors' or characters' personaes, with other elements of the production, often becoming unmoored from a designer's initial work. However, I propose that by attending to the figure of the costume designer, we can uncover important undercurrents in the meaning of costume design.

"Reading Costume Design" focuses on what I call "proto-designers" – other kinds of artists who began to take on the work of costume design, just before the emergence of the specialized professional costume designer as we know her today. Examining the pre-normative practices of proto-designers – their origins, goals, methods – recaptures the way that adjacent artistic disciplines shaped Modern drama. This approach breaks down the barriers of genre both within the performing arts (cutting across theatre, opera, dance) and around them, revealing the influence of contemporary developments in fields such as painting, fashion, and literature. Costumes offer a new way of looking at theatre, opera, and dance together, providing a fresh vantage point on

the ways that several different kinds of fixed texts (dialogue, music, choreography) interact with stage design in performance. More broadly, attention to costume in this period provides new ways of thinking about the relationships between the different texts of an onstage experience, and about the cross-pollination central to Modernism.

Historical context: costumes before 1850

While there were attempts at unified costume design on European stages of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, governed by managers, playwrights, or artists, these efforts were few and far between.[7] A few individual actors or actor-managers moved towards more historical accuracy, notably François-Joseph Talma and David Garrick, but as Aileen Monks writes, "innovations in costume in the eighteenth century were attributed to the actor's art rather than to the tailor's work, or the actor-manager's aesthetic vision."[8] Actors of this era might have made their costumes or had them made (sometimes reimbursed by the theatre management), bought them second-hand, or been given or loaned aristocrats' cast-off clothing.[9] As Aileen Ribeiro notes, this autonomy resulted in stages which showed "a wide mixture of costume, [where] 'historic' dress

[7] See Aileen Ribeiro, "Costuming the Part: A discourse of fashion and fiction in the image of the actress in England, 1776-1812" " in *Notorious Muse: the actress in British art and culture, 1776-1812,* ed. Robyn Asleson (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2003), 104-128; and Paola Bignami, *Storia del costume teatrale: oggetti per esibirsi nello spettacolo e in società* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2005),14. In general, professional costume design was more likely to occur during this period in high-budget, high-status theatres (often royally- or state-supported) and for premiere productions. Revivals, tours, and lesser theatres (the majority of theatrical entertainment) were more likely to rely on actors to provide their own garments, or to select whatever was most appropriate from the theatre's stock.

[8] Monks, *The Actor in Costume*, 125.

[9] Ribeiro, "Costuming the Part," 106. See also the Introduction to Sofia Gnoli, *Moda e Teatro* (Roma: Meltemi editore) 2008.

(interpreted in a variety of ways) could work alongside contemporary clothing."[10] For female performers, especially, contemporary fashion played an important role in the choice of stage garments: "Actresses became barometers of fashion and style… their dresses, hairstyles, and accessories were reviewed, praised, and parodied in the gossip columns."[11] The distinction between onstage costume and offstage clothing was often obscured by actresses' use of their own or others' personal wardrobe items in the theatre.[12] Martha Nussbaum describes the way that "celebrity circulated via clothing and costume from stage to court and back again":

> For example, Maria Beatrice of Modena, the second wife of James II, loaned Elizabeth Barry her wedding suit and coronation robes, while Sarah Siddons mentions in her correspondence that 'Lady B' borrowed her Lady Macbeth banquet dress for a masquerade where 'many of these beauties will appear in my stage finery.'[13]

A scene from Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* reveals the effect of such sartorial circulation between eighteenth-century actors and elite audiences: "wandering into the Comédie Française one night, [the protagonist] cannot distinguish who's on stage and who's supposed to be watching; everyone is parading, posing, having a good time."[14] That is to say, the costumes and street clothing are indistinguishable.

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[10] Ribeiro, 111.

[11] Laura Engle "The Muff Affair: Fashioning Celebrity in the Portraits of Late-Eighteenth-Century British Actresses," *Fashion Theory* 13:3 (2009), 284.

[12] Martha Nussbaum notes that "Anne Oldfield purportedly wore the same dress that she had dined in to the theatre later in the evening" in "Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1700-1800," in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain 1660-2000,* eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 159.

[13] Nussbaum, 159.

[14] Summarized by Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York : Knopf, 1977), 110.

This costume free-for-all began to shift in the nineteenth century, when theatre professionals "and even audiences, were becoming increasingly 'period-conscious.'"[15] Broadly, Martin Meisel identifies a "shift in dramaturgy, from rhetorical to a situational and pictorial mode" across the nineteenth century in England,[16] placing more scrutiny on all visual aspects of production. With rising interest in historically-accurate scenography, some English productions began to employ "archeologists" or "antiquarians": a scholar who served as a historical and/or artistic advisor for a production. Following Charles Kean, lengthy historical program notes became popular, in which the manager or antiquarian consultant would educate the audience about the customs and tastes of a far-off or long-ago place. While such antiquarians may have had unified aesthetic visions for the stage picture, they rarely had much control over what actually appeared on stage.[17] Later in the century, Henry Irving and other English managers worked with artist-designers in a similar advising capacity; the problem of executing a design vision remained.[18] As Ellen Terry put it in 1908, remembering Ellen Kean's portrayal of Hermoine half a century earlier, "then, as now, actors and actresses seemed unable to keep their own period and their own individuality out of the clothes directly they got

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[15] James Laver, *Costume in the Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 167.

[16] Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth- Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 8.

[17] See Alicia Finkel, *Romantic Stages*: *set and costume design in Victorian England* (London: McFarland and Co, Inc., 1996) especially chapter 4, "Wilson Barrett and Edward William Godwin," pp. 61-79.

[18] There are many accounts, for example, of the dissatisfaction of artist Edward Burne-Jones with the execution of his designs for Irving's *King Arthur*. See especially Christine Poulson, "Costume Designs by Burne-Jones for Irving's production of 'King Arthur,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 128: 994 (Jan 1986): 18-25.

them on their backs. In some cases the original design was quite swamped."[19] Even when successfully executed, spectacular costumes of the nineteenth century were often criticized as appeals to populism or commercialism – pandering to the uneducated masses with visual display and/or shilling for certain fashion commodities from the stage – which obscured the same classical texts they claimed to serve.

The rise of pictorial dramaturgy did spur changes in costume practice, although not always as part of a unified vision. Meisel notes that there was often a disjunction between set and costumes, as the new pictorial dramaturgy was adopted in set design before it was applied to individual figures: "there is ample evidence that well into the nineteenth century scenographic art on the one hand and the spectacle of actor and grouping on the other were independent and even mutually interfering effects."[20] This was partly due to the fact that lead actors still supplied their own costumes: Tracy Davis reports that nineteenth-century actresses struggled with the financial burden of ever-more-expensive fashionable or historical costumes, which they sometimes could not or did not wish to provide.[21]

The state of costume in nineteenth-century ballet differed somewhat from theatre and opera. Ballet costume already had a history of abstraction or ritualization, in the white tulle "ballet skirt" (or tutu) of the ballerina, usually dated from Marie Taglioni's

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[19] Ellen Terry, *The Story of my Life* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1908), 14. Terry, who played Mamilius, remembers that Kean added a fashionable crinoline under the character's "Greek" costume.

[20] Meisel, 43.

[21] Tracy Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: their social identity in Victorian culture* (New York: Routledge,1991), 28. She connects this to the gentrification of the profession: "with increasing production costs managers gave preference to women who could supply their own 100 guinea costumes" (37).

performance in *La Sylphide* in the 1830s. As dance historian Cyril Beaumont relates, "previous to the production of *La Sylphide*, ballet costume was very largely a theatricalized version of contemporary dress; the Sylphide costume, with occasional exception, remains the accepted costume for the *danseuse* of the classical ballet."[22] Dance scholars Mary Clark and Clement Crisp argue that due to "the ritualization of the ballerina's appearance… her persona on the stage was not that of the role she played but the more permanent and easily recognizable figure of the ballerina as star dancer."[23] Mary Cargill claims that nineteenth-century ballet costume was ripe for reform, seeing the designs as merely "artistically negligible" displays of eroticism: "ballet itself was becoming a sort of high-class burlesque show in Western Europe… indeed, the word 'tutu' comes from French slang for bottom."[24] Ballet costume was freer from the expectations of historical realism or fashionableness which predominated in theatre and opera performance of the period; like them, however, it related more to circumstances outside the theatre than to the expressing the ballet's story or style. Costumes in all three genres were influenced by new technologies of reproduction and fueled by emergent celebrity culture.

Costume design and new technologies of the nineteenth century

The eighteenth-century reuse, multiple use, and overlap of costumes – between productions and between a performer's real life and stage roles – were partly a function

[22] Cyril W. Beaumont, *Ballet Design Past and Present* (London: Wazell, Watson and Viney, Ltd., 1946), xxiii.

[23] Mary Clarke and Clement Crisp, *Design for Ballet* (London: Studio Vista, 1978), 101.

[24] Mary Cargill, "Dance Costumes in the Western Performance Tradition" in Friedland, Nancy E. (ed). *Documenting: Costume Design* (New York: Theatre Library Association, 2010), 6.

of the extraordinary amount of money and labor that went into creating a new garment. Thus, the impact of the Industrial Revolution upon costume design can hardly be overstated. First, material costs for fabric and thread dropped, as the market was flooded with products of (largely English) industrial weaving and spinning. With the spread of the sewing machine and the advent of ready-to-wear clothing, which reached critical mass around the middle of the nineteenth century in Paris and London, the process of acquiring a new garment changed drastically for all segments of society, whether for street or stage wear. Building a new costume especially for a particular character or production (or even simply buying one from a shop, in the case of contemporary plays) became far easier and cheaper than before, allowing costumes to be more closely tailored to a specific performance.

The other revolutionary invention of this period, for costume design, was the photograph. Rosemary Barrow writes that "in the nineteenth century, a fresh visual language altered ways of representation and reception, with illustration, painting, literature, and performance now linked by a common visuality."[25] This common language was made possible by an explosion of the availability of visual images, which could now circulate in prints, *cartes-de-visite,* and the illustrated press; a new kind of visual literacy became available to a wide public. Shearer West argues that "photography both reflected and redirected how people saw the world around them… early photography mediated vision."[26] The rise in visual technologies of reproduction changed the way that costumes

[25] Rosemary Barrow, "Toga Plays and Tableaux Vivants: Theatre and Painting on London's Late-Victorian and Edwardian Stage" in *Theatre Journal* 62:2 (May 2010): 210.

[26] Shearer West, "The Photographic Portraiture of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry" in *Ruskin, the Theatre and Victorian Visual Culture,* ed. Anselm Heinrich, Katherine Newey, and Jeffrey Richards. (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 189.

could be appreciated. For the first time, costume images existed outside the theatre on a large scale: audiences could view costume images again after the event, and had access to images of productions they had not attended in person. In addition, audiences were able to look more closely at clothing – publicity photos of actors in costume almost certainly revealed more details of their garments than would have been visible to an audience member, except from the very closest seats. The increased access to visual materials after the middle of the nineteenth century enabled a new kind of looking, and eventually a new relationship, between individual actors and audiences.

This newly-intimate situation of actor and audience was part of a growing and changing model of celebrity. Abigail Solomon-Godeau points out the key role that female performing artists played in the "discursive current" of "an intensified and expanded notion of celebrity, a phenomenon reciprocally fueled and in part constructed precisely by that traffic in images, particularly *carte-de-visite* and stereopticon photographs" and the rise of the illustrated press.[27] While publicity and production photos may have been originally intended as records of a production or as souvenirs for audience members who had attended, they soon became collectors' items disconnected from the theatrical event.[28] Solomon-Godeau understands the popularity of actresses' photos to be "underwritten by fantasies of imaginary possession… for the bourgeois men at the opera who could not afford to touch, but only to look, the diminutive image of the

[27] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," in *October* 39 (Winter, 1986): 92-93. See also Lenard Berlanstein on the special importance of actresses in the trajectory of celebrity culture: Lenard Berlanstein, "Historicizing and Gendering Celebrity Culture: Famous Women in Nineteenth-Century France" in *Journal of Women's History* 16: 4 (Winter 2004): 65-91.

[28] William Sauter has discovered that at the turn of the century "in Paris one could buy booklets with the complete *mise-en-scène* of a recent production to take home, to reproduce at one's own theatre" in *The Theatrical Event: dynamics of performance and perception* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 140.

living woman – sexualized, compliant, immobilized – is the token of their power."[29] More recently, however, scholars have explored the two-way power dynamics of such looking, suggesting that female performers could manipulate the perceptions of the elite male audience through self-consciously produced images. Nineteenth-century actors could use the new in-costume portraits to enhance their celebrity status, resulting in higher wages, or to craft an advantageous public image (perhaps one at odds with their private life). This visual manipulation through clothing could work on an increasingly subtle scale, since details could now be read more closely and costumes could be viewed many times. Also, expanded understandings of the audience's gaze as heterogeneous (including women and a wide spectrum of socioeconomic classes) open up the possibility of another kind of "fantasies of possession": for bourgeois and lower-class women, purchasing actresses' photos may have functioned as a way to participate in theatre or high fashion.

In addition to changing the relationship between actors, costumes and audiences, photography also made it easier for images to circulate between theatre-makers themselves. In a sense, new technologies of reproduction "globalized" costume design, allowing directors, performers and designers in places as far-flung as Russia, England and America to view each others' work. Design innovations in one theatre could now be viewed, copied, or rejected a continent away. I suggest that photography partially accounts for the closer relationships internationally between artists and theaters, and also between the genres of opera, theatre and ballet design around the turn of the century – developments could be easily shared across genres as well as geographical distances.

[29] Solomon-Godeau, 94.

Captured as a photo-realistic image, costume design became one of the easiest elements of a production to transport and communicate with other artists.

Antecedents and methodologies

"Reading Costume Design" draws together scholarship from several fields. Writing on costume design proper is surprisingly rare. Extant scholarship that focuses in this area is mostly pre-1970, and largely historical: works in this vein include James Laver, Diana DeMarly, Cyril Beaumont, and Douglas Russell. The last decade shows a nascent reinvigoration of the field from a more theoretical standpoint, however, seen principally in Monks' *The Actor in Costume* and in the emerging Italian school of costume theory, spearheaded by Paola Bignami. While older works on fashion can be dangerous for the student of costume design, as they sometimes do not differentiate between clothing (everyday dress) and costume (performance garments), recently several much more nuanced works on the relationship between street and stage garments have appeared, such as Joel Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, Marlis Schweitzer, and Sophia Gnoli. There is also a clutch of very useful recent books engaging the relationship between fashion, costume and music, particularly works by Mary E. Davis, Nancy Troy, and approaching from the specialty of opera, Susan Rutherford. Dance scholarship has produced some interesting work on costume, especially surrounding the Ballets Russes (following Lynne Garafola's immense contribution to this topic) and brings an important sensitivity to issues of performing bodies. Celebrity studies is another helpful area: works like Joseph Roach's *It*, for example, often analyze the role of the costume (or the costumed body) in creating a celebrity mystique.

My methodology here, on a practical level, is simple: I have followed the (proto) designer, looking for early and interesting instances of "interpretation" in costume. This study is limited to performances that originated in Europe, although several case studies discussed here did reach American on tour. I have drawn upon both semiotic approaches to theatre, following Erika Fischer-Lichte, Marvin Carlson, and Dennis Kennedy, and also on hermeneutic lenses present in reception theory by scholars such as Susan Bennett, Willmar Sauter, and Philip Auslander. Ric Knowles' development of "materialist semiotics" has been very helpful to me, especially his investigation of the "tension between [an] insistence on the materiality of (as opposed to textuality) of theatre, and the act of reading, which is usually understood to constitute what is read *as* text."[30] Sociology has provided me with helpful grounding as well, both more general theorists like Erving Goffman and Richard Sennett, and particular applications to theatre, such as the work of Tracy Davis. Lastly, methods from gender and visuality scholarship permeate this project, with scholars following John Berger and Laura Mulvey offering important models for the meticulous close-reading of performance images.

Organization: the chapters

My chapters are organized around four categories of people who took on the work of costume design: directors, performers, couturiers, and fine artists. Chapter One, "Material Truths: costume design and the rise of the director," uncovers a latent tension between the popularity of historically-accurate costumes in the nineteenth-century and the new figure of the autocratic theatre director. Using the case studies of Georg II, Duke

[30] Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2004, 3.

of Saxe-Meiningen, and Richard Wagner, I argue that while this historical accuracy, seen as educational, ameliorated concerns that costume-as-spectacle undermined the legitimate theatre text, such accuracy in fact worked against costume *design* as creative interpretation. Both Saxe-Meiningen and Wagner engaged with the concept of accuracy in costuming, but ultimately surpassed it, using costume to tell "truth" in an artistic rather than a historical way.

The second chapter, "Frocks and Fictions: nineteenth-century actresses' innovations in costume design," focuses on the relation between costume and character. Through close readings of Marietta Piccolomini as Violetta Valèry (1855) and Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth (1888), I argue that actresses used stage garments to create and balance two different kinds of fictions. Each of these performers expanded the role of costume as a tool for creating a fictional character, conveying information about the character's interiority rather than the actress' status or taste; in a parallel way, Piccolomini and Terry extended this expressive function of stage garments to shape perceptions of their private lives. Onstage and off, both performers used costume choices, disseminated through new mechanisms of celebrity, as a way of mediating between the real and the fictional and between the public and the private.

Chapter Three, "Couture Costumes: art, craft, and authority," examines the destabilizing power of costumes made by fashion designers Paul Poiret and Lucy Duff-Gordon ("Lucile"), which raised anxieties about what or whom could be created, displayed, or purchased. I suggest that haute-couture extended the transformative possibilities of stage costume to all, converting not only unknown actresses into celebrities, but also *nouveau-riche* or scandalous women into virtuous aristocratic ladies.

A second transformation occurred in the triangular interaction between fashion, theatre, and fine art – through an engagement with theatre, I argue, couture costumes were able to legitimate themselves as original art objects suitable for the gallery or museum.

My fourth chapter, "Sartorial Symbols: fine artists and costume design," reconsiders the opposition between the Ballets Russes' "painterly" design and the new "plastic" scenography of Appia and Craig, by shifting the focus from set design to costume design. I argue that in fact, costumes by Edward Gordon Craig and Ballets Russes designers Leon Bakst and Pablo Picasso have much in common: all use a combination of flat and three-dimensional elements to create complex relationships between body, garment, and stage picture. Most importantly, each designer offers a model of costumes' communication with audiences – speech (Craig), music (Bakst) and writing (Picasso). These costumes play with surface and depth, physically and metaphysically, to reflect upon the radical presence of the human (body) within the work of art.

Final Arguments

Together, these chapters show a development towards (in Barthes' terms) costumes that make an "argument" about "the play itself." In addition, the dissertation as a whole traces a broad cultural change from considering costumes as craft to viewing (or "reading") costumes as art. The shift in the status of stage garments from craft to art created an instability still at play in contemporary definitions of what a costume *is* as a material object and *does* as a theoretical concept. "Reading Costume Design" focuses on the art of design rather than the craft of building the physical costume, but maintains that

these are concomitant processes which cannot ever be completely separated. The case studies in this project show costume design resisting pressure towards fixity or categorization, instead oscillating between or doubling the material and the symbolic. This tension can also be expressed as a difference between surface and depth: looking *through* versus looking *at*. Barthes argues in his 1955 essay that costume "must find that kind of rare equilibrium which permits it to help us read the theatrical act without encumbering it by any parasitical value… it must be both material and transparent: we must see it but not look at it."[31] Once it attains the status of art, costume can be "read" in this new way, and can take on an expanded role in the creation of the performance event. Ultimately, I suggest it is costume's new status as art that allows it to "argue" about metaphysical issues.

This project works to de-center writing and acting as the driving forces of western performance, reconsidering the role of design in the development of theatre history. "Reading Costume Design" offers an alternative genealogy of theatre – and other performing arts – through costume design, and in a larger way, through scenography as a whole. This kind of attention to design shows us a new network of relationships or sphere of influence between the performing arts and other cultural areas such as literature, fine art, and even politics – connections active in Modernism and in our own period. Barthes concludes that "The costumer must therefore avoid being either a painter or a couturier… it is an understatement to say that he must subject his art to the play: he must destroy it."[32] I hope that "Reading Costume Design" shows how, out of this break-down and

[31] Barthes, "Diseases of Costume," 50.

[32] Barthes, "Diseases of Costume," 44.

recombining of various other arts, a new art is forged which is of crucial importance in considering Modernism and performance.

Annie Holt
Chapter 1

Material truths: costume design, historicism, and the rise of the director

[T]he oscillation between the concrete detail of realism and a poetics of abstraction is a constructive tension of the modern stage.[33]

-- Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner, Introduction to *Against Theatre*

The rise of the director in European theatre, with its emphasis on images and singular vision, has broad implications for costume design. The rise of the director was roughly concurrent with the popularity of historical realism on the stage, another trend which raised awareness of images, particularly costumes. On the surface, these two developments seem convergent: one overriding artistic vision is able to ensure historical consistency for an entire production. However, a closer examination of historical costumes reveals several ways in which accurate period costume in fact existed in tension with a director's unifying vision. Costumes flourished under the historical directors, but were always accompanied by anxieties that costume was not a legitimate part of theatre – in fact, that it undermined the high-art parts of drama like classical texts. Historical accuracy, while it raised the profile of costume pieces, actually worked against costume *design* as interpretation, creative art, or unified stage picture. This chapter pays particular attention to the ways in which costume, as a material object, could offer "truth" on the stage. It traces the development of different kinds of truth-telling through costume, arguing for a through-line that stretches from the conservative historicism of the early-nineteenth-century stage (J.R. Planché and Charles Kean) through the innovations of Georg II of Saxe-Meiningen to the ahistorical artistic truths of Richard Wagner.

[33] Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner (eds.), Introduction to *Against Theatre: Creative destructions on the modernist stage* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5.

James Robinson Planché and Charles Kean: historical accuracy

In early-nineteenth-century England, George Rowell relates that "polite society quitted the theatre for the opera house and the play for the novel."[1] English theatre of the period catered mostly to a popular taste for spectacle and melodrama, seen as having a lower-class appeal, and best represented in the "burletta" performances which proliferated at the unlicensed theatres.[2] At the same time, interest in material history was on the rise as a scholarly pursuit for gentlemen, under the new term "antiquarianism."[3] In March of 1823, Charles Kemble revived *King John* at Covent Garden; without the popular acting team of Charles Kemble's siblings (John Philip Kemble as King John and Sarah Siddons as Constance), however, it closed after only a few performances.[4] A few months later, a young playwright named James Robinson Planché approached Kemble with a radical idea: reopen the production with all-new costumes drawn from historical sources. Planché advanced some arguments about making the costumes worthy of Shakespeare's text, but "high-minded principles of intellectual integrity aside, the twenty-seven-year-old Planché was also banking on the commercial value of historically

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[1] George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre 1792-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 4.

[2] Only a few theatres in early-nineteenth-century London were permitted to perform "legitimate drama," while other houses were confined to musical comedy and other lighter entertainment. "Burletta" was a form that arose early in the century as a way around this patent system, allowing unlicensed theatres to present plays, usually melodramas, which included a few songs. The patent system was abolished in 1843. See Rowell 8-13, among others.

[3] The Society of Antiquaries was founded in 1707, but gained more public attention in the early nineteenth century, especially after the British Museum acquired the Rosetta Stone in 1802, which galvanized interest in ancient objects.

[4] Eugene Waith writes that "for almost thirty years this remarkable team" was considered to be the best performance of *King John*. Eugene M. Waith, "King John and the Drama of History," in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29:2 (Spring 1978): 195. In March 1823, John Philip had just died, and Sarah Siddons was retired.

accurate *mise-en-scène*; and it was equally on the basis of box-office potential that he pleaded his case to Charles Kemble."[5] Planché's key innovation was to combine the (low-class) populism of visual spectacle and the (high-class) vogue for archeology: his *King John* costumes were spectacular and entertaining, but also "true" and therefore educational. As he wrote in *The Album* a few months before the performance, "Granting that the taste of the town be still wedded to stage pomp and spectacle, that taste may be as fully, while it is more rationally, gratified; and the severer few who exclaim against the glitter that garnishes a tale of enchantment, will applaud the pageantry that illustrates the higher branches of our drama."[6] Planché's conflation of spectacle and history in stage garments both opened up and limited the field of costume design.

To emphasize the scholarly dimension of the work, Planché issued a book of 22 of his *King John* costume designs, meticulously documenting his sources for each one, about three months before the production opened.[7] He also anonymously published the article in *The Album* quoted above (and possibly other articles[8]), calling for greater

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[5]Richard W. Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75.

[6] [James Robinson] P[lanché], "Dramatic Costume," in *The Album* VI (Aug 1823): 299. *The Hathi Trust Digital Library.* http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000501568. This article is signed only "P" but Paul Reinhardt convincingly attributes it to Planché, based on an analysis of the style of his later signed articles. Paul Reinhardt, "The Costume Designs of James Robinson Planche (1796-1880)," in *Educational Theatre Journal* 20:4 (Dec., 1968): 525.

[7] J.R. Planché, *Costume of Shakespeare's historical tragedy of King John: selected and arranged from the best authorities, expressly for the proprietors of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden: with biographical, critical and explanatory notices* (London: John Miller, 1823).

[8] Jon Kenner Evans suggests that a letter advocating historical costume in the January 1823 issue of *The Drama or Theatrical Pocket Magazine* was also written by Planché. Jon Kenner Evans, *James Robinson Planche and his Influence on Playwriting, Design and Staging in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Theatre* (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1986), 183. ProQuest (8700992).

historical accuracy in the costuming of Shakespeare's plays – engineering a demand for the product he would shortly supply. These writings drew the attention of more educated readers and scholarly journals. Once it opened, the production was extremely popular, both at the box office and in the press. While there were some visual missteps, many felt that these were outweighed by the potential for audience education: as a representative review from *The Examiner* reasoned,

> We fear that the chief satisfaction is derivable rather from an appeal to reason, and the love of accuracy, than to a feeling of the elegant and the picturesque. We subscribe, however, to the utility of the Managerial reform, and of the information which it will gradually diffuse. We may occasionally, indeed, conceive a disadvantage, as in the close steel helmet which disfigured the noble head of Mr. C. Kemble; but a little minor adaptation will generally get over these difficulties.[9]

A closer look at Planché's published group of costume sketches, however, foreshadows one problem faced by later historical stagings: it supplanted Shakespeare's text, which was not included in the book. As Richard Schoch explains, because of this absence of the text, "the free-standing display of historically accurate stage costumes divorced from any dispositive textual referent indicates that the strength of the intended performance would lie in its historical reality. The costumes commanded attention from spectators and readers because they were, in fact, not costumes at all (their publication preceded the King John revival by a few months) but rather verified historical documents."[10] The criticism of the "close steel helmet which disfigured the noble head of Mr. C. Kemble" indicated the other way in which historical costuming threatened traditional stage values: it overwhelmed the star actor. While "the Kemble-Planché

[9] "Theatrical Examiner," in *The Examiner* (London), November 30, 1823, *19th Century British Library Newspapers*.
[10] Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage*, 78.

revival of *King John* demonstrated that the theatre's comparative advantage in historical representation was not in scenery, but in costume […] as a living embodiment of the past, the theatre remained without peer,"[11] elaborate historicism often subordinated the actor to the costume, which was rarely popular. As Alicia Finkel notes, "the ambition to use the stage as a frame for displaying the designer's, rather than the actor's, art has haunted successive generations of scene designers."[12]

By the 1840s, there was a strong sense that historicism could get out of hand: Schoch finds multiple uses of Frankenstein metaphors to describe the way that spectacle was taking over the theatre. He explains, "had Macready remained any longer at Drury Lane, [Fraser's] magazine speculated, he might have 'like another Frankenstein… become the slave of the demon he invoked'. That simile tells us, above all, that theatrical historicism was to be feared as a potentially uncontrollable monster which might one day enthrall its own creator."[13] This perception of spectacle as a threat to the literary text points to the need for one strong unified consciousness to control the visual field. By mid-century, this person was no longer a gentleman-scholar-designer, but a proto-director. In fact, we might look at the rise of the director as a response to innovations in design, rather than vice versa; at the very least, the rise of director and the rise of "spectacular" theatre design on a large scale are concomitant phenomena.

One of the first of these visionary proto-directors was actor-manager Charles Kean (most famous for his historical stagings of Shakespeare at the Princess's Theatre,

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[11] Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage*, 76.

[12] Alicia Finkel, *Romantic Stages: Set and Costume Design in Victorian England* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1996), 18.

[13] Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage,* 107-108. His quotation is from a Macready retrospective in *Fraser's Magazine* 57 (Jan-June 1858).

1852-1859). Finkel writes that "It is not surprising that Planché's most loyal disciple was Charles Kean, whose ambition to turn the stage into 'a true and perfect mirror of history and manners' included costumes as well as scenery. Kean chose *King John*, the same play that had initiated the trend toward faithful reconstruction of historical costume in 1823, as his first attempt to attain this goal" in 1852 at the Princess's Theatre.[14] In fact, Kean "openly plagiarized Planché's essays on costumes," lifting whole sentences from Planché's *Costumes of Shakespeare's Macbeth* for the playbill of his 1853 *Macbeth* production.[15] Criticisms identifying the spectacular costumes as a threat to the playwright's text and the actor's work were leveled at Kean as well: Hans Christian Anderson wrote of Kean's production of *The Tempest* (1857) that "Shakespeare was lost in visual pleasure; the exciting poetry was petrified by illustrations; the living word had evaporated. No one tasted the spiritual banquet – it was forgotten for the golden platter on which it was served."[16] However, on the whole Planché's coupling of spectacle and scholarship proved even more popular at mid-century: "the audience, the only important critic for a manger dependent on box-office revenue, had consistently bestowed its approval on those productions."[17]

To ameliorate complaints like Anderson's, Kean emphasized the usefulness of historical images as education. In the playbill for his *Richard II* (1857), he wrote, "An

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[14] Finkel, *Romantic Stages*, 115. (The internal quote is from Kean's preface to an edition of *Henry VIII*). Kean was not the first to imitate Planché's *King John* costumes, which had also been copied by Macready in 1842 – see Eugene M. Waith, "King John and the Drama of History."

[15] Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage,* 63n.

[16] Quoted in Finkel, *Romantic Stages*, 57.

[17] Finkel, *Romantic Stages*, 100.

increasing taste for recreation wherein instruction is blended with amusement, has for some time been conspicuous in the English public; and surely an attempt to render dramatic representation conductive to the diffusion of knowledge […] can scarcely detract from the enduring influence of his [Shakespeare's] great genius."[18] This strategy seems to have largely succeeded in re-involving an elite audience in the English theatre. Kean was also assisted in this endeavor by the approval of Queen Victoria, who placed him in charge of producing theatre at court;[19] in 1856, "after Queen Victoria requested a photograph of the Keans in theatrical costume for her personal collection, a rumor arose that Charles Kean would become the first representative of the theatre to be knighted."[20] Although the knighthood was not forthcoming, Finkel describes how "Queen Victoria's patronage, combined with Kean's high standards of production, lent an aura of respectability to the actor's managerial endeavors, attracting the same upper- and middle-class audience that had remained, during the last decades, conspicuously absent from the playhouses that offered serious drama."[21]

In another way, however, Kean's productions represented a step back for costume design: as Finkel explains,

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[18] Quoted in M. Glen Wilson, "Charles Kean's Production of Richard II," in *Educational Theatre Journal* 19:1 (March 1967): 42.

[19] "The Queen's response to the demand for royal encouragement of English drama was to reinstate the office of Master of Revels, attaching to the position the responsibility of producing annual theatricals at Windsor Castle... she awarded the position to Charles Kean [in 1848], charging him to assemble the best English players in the production of works of her choosing [...] marking him as the Queen's favorite and his work as eminently respectable. Royal patronage followed Kean into the Princess's where Victoria secured a box as soon as Kean assumed the management." Nancy J. Doran Hazelton, *Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Shakespearean Staging* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 68.

[20] Schoch *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage*, 60.

[21] Finkel, *Romantic Stages*, 31.

> Whereas all the published reviews credit the artists responsible for the scenery, no mention is ever made of a costume designer. The comments always attribute the beauty and accuracy of the wardrobe to Kean himself, but there is not even a hint that, as would be expected in a modern show, he produced drawings that were subsequently made into garments in a costume shop. The experts he consulted were scholars, not designers [...] some names were occasionally mentioned in the programs as 'builders' of the dresses. All of these facts clearly indicate that, in spite of Planché's heritage, the notion of commissioning one person to be in charge of creating the costumes was still not a commonly accepted one.[22]

Kean and even later actor-managers demonstrate how far ahead of his time Planché really was as a practicing designer. Both in the sophistication of his designs, which (especially later in his career) skillfully blended historical accuracy into a unified aesthetic style,[23] and also in the public credit he achieved for his authorship of his designs and the free hand he seems to have had in carrying them out, Planché achieved a level of design recognition and autonomy which would not be repeated until the end of the century. His own scholarly publications, especially after his election to the Society of Antiquaries in 1829, went a long way towards establishing this. He was also fortunate to work primarily before the era of the director, who would have controlled the visual unity of the production - later designers, even high-status ones like fellow antiquarian E. W. Godwin, were often frustrated by the meddling of actor-managers or early directors.

While Planché represents an important instance of a costume designer before the late nineteenth century, paradoxically, the ways in which he framed costume design proved somewhat stifling for it as a creative discipline. Planché's lasting innovation, extended by Kean, was to legitimate audience pleasure in visual spectacle through the "educational" aspect of historicism – as Aoife Monks sums it up, "accuracy operate[d] as

[22] Finkel, *Romantic Stages,* 124.

[23] see Reinhardt, "The Costume Designs of James Robinson Planche (1796-1880)."

the alibi for pleasure."[24] This meant, however, that later designers could become trapped in correctness: if accuracy was the only thing protecting the production design from charges of lower-class audience pandering or swallowing up the text, then there could be very little room for interpretation, because the costumes' truth claims were paramount. There is evidence that Planché himself subtly adjusted costumes to conform to nineteenth-century taste, or chose to present certain bygone eras over others because they already matched contemporary fashion; however, the public perception of his historical work was that it was strictly "correct".[25] In fact, most contemporary criticism of Planché's designs complains that it is too slavishly historical, as opposed to aesthetically pleasing: "The costumes for the most part rest upon authority… yet authority might be found for dresses falling in more graceful lines… whatever an Etruscan vase may say to the contrary."[26] While this critic clearly values historical accuracy, his double use of "authority" points toward other authorities which came into conflict later in the century:

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[24] Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 53. She is discussing a later production by Charles Kean, but it seems clear that Planché pioneered this conflation of pleasure and accuracy.

[25] Reinhardt offers detailed analysis of several of Planché's designs next to their declared sources, and finds many small changes which bring the costumes more in line with contemporary tastes. He also points out that in Planché's later "Extravaganza" work with Madame Vestris, historical accuracy was not emphasized, either by the playbills or in the press. See Reinhardt, ""The Costume Designs of James Robinson Planche (1796-1880)." However, a survey of reviews of Planché's earlier historical work with Charles Kemble, as well as his own costume design books published in tandem with these productions, make clear that historical truth was the overriding factor in selling these productions to the public. Planché's *King John* costume book (cited above) became the first of a five-part series published by John Miller of London, all of which were "arranged and selected from the best authorities": *King Henry the Fourth, parts 1st and 2nd* (1824), *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* together in one volume (1825), *As You Like It* (1825), and *Hamlet* (1825).

[26] This is a review of Planché's costumes for Madame Vestris' 1840 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* quoted in Finkel, *Romantic Stages*, 112.

the authority of the designer as interpretive artist, the authority of the audience which knows what it likes to see, and the authority of the unifying director.

Georg II of Saxe-Meiningen: the art of production design

Long considered the father of modern directing practice, Duke Georg II of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914) brought another kind of authority to his theatrical work: that of royalty. As the sole financial backer of the Meiningen court theatre, as well as its ruling head of state, Georg had unprecedented power to create exactly what he liked; his productions were internationally influential between 1874-1890 when the Meiningen theatre toured a series of productions across western Europe and Russia. While the Meininger Ensemble is often remembered for highly-realistic historical sets and costumes, "there is ample evidence of the careful use of costume for specific interpretative purposes."[27]

Georg II, who assumed personal control of his Court Theatre in 1870, was concerned about the commercialism of the German theatre. The audience and economics of German theatre had shifted in the mid-nineteenth century: similar to the changes in the English theatre system, German theatres were deregulated in 1869, abolishing the monopoly on certain kinds of drama previously held by court theatres in each principality. As historian John Osborne notes, this resulted in an explosion of new theatres, and a theatre market driven by commercial audiences rather than aristocratic patrons;[28] as in England, historical sets and costumes proved effective strategies for

[27] John Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre, 1866-1890* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 163.
[28] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 35.

drawing bourgeois audiences in cities like Berlin and Munich.[29] Georg was wary of market-driven art, however: in an 1860 letter about music, "he condemns the practice of letting public taste determine the level of performance, reasoning that the level of taste declines continuously as performance standards are lowered to meet the common demand. Conversely, if a high level of performance, based on artistic consideration, is maintained, then the public's taste will ultimately rise to meet that standard."[30] Former Meiningen actor Max Grube reflected on the relationship of public education to the famous Meininger historicism: "Was it the Duke's purpose to educate people by this historical accuracy? I don't believe so; he sought to know the truth for truth's sake, and the multiplicity of its forms excited his painter's eye."[31] As a member of the nobility able to support the theatre out of pocket,[32] Georg was under less pressure to lure popular audiences with entertainment or to persuade upper-class patrons to attend the theatre for education; this freedom allowed him to use historical accuracy as far as he found it artistically useful, and modify it when he desired. Although it is undoubtedly true that

[29] See Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 23.

[30] Steven DeHart, *The Meininger Theatre, 1776-1926* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1981), 8.

[31] Max Grube, *The Story of the Meininger*, trans. Ann Marie Koller (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1963), 48.

[32] This was true only in the beginning of Georg's work. After 1874, the tours had to pay for themselves in ticket sales, which at first they did. By the late 1880s, however, Georg was spending more per production, and needed longer and longer runs to recoup. According to Koller, financial strain on the Saxe-Meiningen duchy was one consideration in ending the tours in 1890 (although a much larger factor was Chronegk's death in that year). See Ann Marie Koller, *The Theatre Duke: Georg II of Saxe-Meiningen and the German Stage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 180.

the Duke was strongly influenced by Kean,[33] this was their major difference: Georg could afford the luxury of taking artistic risks.

Georg had a strong background in visual art, having studied painting seriously since childhood, and his vision for the stage seems primarily to come from this experience. He usually began his process with visual research and sketches of important moments: "the most important groupings in the plays were frequently determined in advance in sketches."[34] As Osborne points out, "Coming to the theatre from the visual arts, and himself lacking practical experience in matters of staging and the direction and training of actors, Georg was in need of advisers and assistants who would help him to implement his ideas";[35] he found them in his stage-manager Ludwig Chronegk and his third wife Ellen Franz, who acted as his dramaturg and literary advisor. The importance of this directing team is sometimes overlooked in studies which emphasize Georg as one of the first modern directors. While Georg was responsible for the overall conception of the stage picture, Chronegk did the actual onstage work with actors, while Georg and Ellen watched from a box; as one guest actor recalled, "Georg seemed to want to keep a distance between himself and the actors."[36] Ellen was responsible for writing down the Duke's notes and transmitting them to Chronegk before the next rehearsal. Ellen, a former actor in the Meiningen troupe before her marriage to Georg in 1873,[37] had great

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[33] See Muriel St. Clare Byrne, "Charles Kean and the Meininger Myth," *Theatre Research* IV.3 (1962).

[34] Grube, *The Story of the Meininger,* 22.

[35] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 58.

[36] DeHart, *The Meininger Theatre,* 28, quoting actor Siegward Freidmann.

[37] Because Ellen was of lower social status, her marriage to the Duke was "morganic," meaning that she did not assume his name or titles, and children of the union would have been considered

influence over the choice of plays, translations, and revisions; she was also present at auditions and coached the performers on their textwork and acting.[38] Many accounts credit the idea to take the group on tour to Ellen; Chronegk was the only one of the three who accompanied the troupe on the road.[39] Grube even recalls that the trio tried alternate stagings if there was a disagreement: "I cannot remember that he [Georg] ever gave an important instruction without the concurrence of his co-workers [Ellen and Chronegk]. If a difference of opinion arose, the scene in question would be rehearsed according to each interpretation. It was not unusual to see it in three versions. Then the most effective parts would be chosen from each."[40] While there are good reasons to view Georg as the first modern director (he conceived productions as a whole and did have the final say), it might be equally productive to consider him as the first production designer, or at least director-designer;[41] it is telling that while he left the notes to actors to Ellen and Chronegk, he always wrote to the set painters personally.[42]

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illegitimate (they had none). Even so, the marriage was seen as scandalous and alienated Georg from members of his family and other German nobility. Georg bestowed on her the title of "Helene, Freifrau von Heldburg" upon their marriage, since she could not be called "Duchess;" she is sometimes referred to as Baroness Heldburg. It is worth noting that before her marriage, she was close friends with the future Cosima Wagner; Ellen studied music with Han von Bülow, Cosima's first husband. Cosima and her father Franz Liszt were influential in persuading Ellen's middle-class parents to allow their daughter to pursue a career on the stage.

[38] see DeHart, *The Meininger Theatre,* 85-86, and Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 60.

[39] This may have been part of the reason why, as Osborne relates, Chronegk "was so closely associated with the Meininger that many people believed he was the moving spirit behind the enterprise" such as Stanislavski, who credits Chronegk for their production choices. Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 79.

[40] Grube, *The Story of the Meininger,* 34.

[41] Lee Simonson uses this term for Georg in his book *The Stage is Set* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), 284.

[42] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 60.

Costume was an integral part of Georg's vision from the beginning; he was dedicated to historical accuracy for the most part, but worked within this field to create both more aesthetically pleasing stage pictures and to convey dramaturgical information. Original fabrics and construction methods were important to Georg: his costumes were noted for their use of authentic materials rather than the usual stage substitutes (real jewels, real chain mail, etc.[43]), and he had many fabrics specially woven for the Meiningen theatre using historical techniques.[44] He also studied period fabric and clothing construction with Hermann Weiss, one of the first German historians of dress.[45]

After such careful study and design, the correct wearing of the costume by the actor was also important to Georg. He insisted upon many rehearsals in costume, which he believed necessary because "it must not be evident from his [the actor's] actions and movements that he is wearing a 'costume' in which the wardrobe-master has just dressed him; nor should we be reminded of a fancy-dress parade or masked ball."[46] He also took steps to make sure the actors did not alter their costumes: as Max Grube describes,

> Sketched on large octavo sheets, they [costume sketches] are done only in outline, but all the individual characteristics are distinctly apparent. Occasionally, details are noted in the margin. On the evening of a performance, each actor found such a sheet at this place, so that there would be no misunderstanding between him and the wardrobe master about how each piece of costume was to be worn… these pictures almost always show, too, a distinctive posture of the character.[47]

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[43] Grube, *The Story of the Meininger,* 50-51.

[44] DeHart, *The Meininger Theatre,* 86.

[45] Weiss' book *Kostümkunde: Geschichte der Tracht und des Geräths* was published in 1860.

[46] From Georg's notes written to Paul Lindau, stage-director or Intendant of the Meiningen Theatre after Chronegk's death, 1895-1899. Quoted and translated in Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 151.

[47] Grube, *The Story of the Meininger*, 22. This sketch in the dressing room clearly functions as a modern "dressing list," the first such that I have found; it is possible that Georg instituted this custom.

Fig. 1: Georg's sketch for Petruchio

Such a strict practice was necessary to achieve a consistent look. Grube notes that "Before the time of the Meininger, the art of costume had already approached a degree of accuracy through the influence of Paris, where painters generally had made a thorough study of historical detail in garments; but the stage costumer was still dependent upon the actor, whose taste and wishes had to be carefully taken into consideration."[48] Actor changes had been perhaps the single greatest impediment to historical accuracy earlier in the nineteenth century, on both the English and German stages – actors very often altered their costumes to be more fashionable or becoming, such as Ellen Tree Kean (wife of Charles Kean) who refused to wear any costume without a crinoline, to the great detriment of consistent historical look, as Georg himself noted.[49] In contrast, "the Meiningen theatre furnished its actors entire costumes, complete down to the smallest detail – including, as Josef Kainz wrote his parents, even the linen […] the actor was allowed to wear only what had

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[48] Grube, *The Story of the Meininger,* 49.
[49] Georg saw the Kean production of *Richard II* while on a state visit to London, and critiqued it in letter to his mother of 24 May 1857, noting that Mrs. Kean's crinoline under a medieval costume was ridiculous. Summarized in Koller, *The Theatre Duke,* 52.

been expressly designed for him in one designated role, and he was forbidden to alter it in any way."[50] Grube points out that unlike managers at other theatres, "In such matters a Duke could step in with an 'I wish this' or an 'I order that' against which no refusal could stand."[51]

However, historical authenticity was ultimately secondary to the Duke's sense of what worked onstage. Grube relates that for their production of *Die Verschwörung des Fiesko zu Genua*, "The Meininger abandoned Schiller's stage instructions: 'the costume of the nobility is entirely black,' for this mode did not predominate until long after Fiesko's death" and used bright colors instead.[52] This seems to have been both a historical and theatrical/artistic decision – the Duke was correcting Schiller's history, having discovered that black was not customary during the historical Fiesko's lifetime, but he was also using design to clarify the dramaturgy. Grube goes on to say that the use of "the gay colors of the fifteenth century… proclaimed the wealth of proud Genoa, and made it seem comprehensible that to steal the ducal crown of such a city would be 'god-like.'"[53] Georg also used costume for comic effect, for example instructing that Portia and Nerissa should enter "wearing large, clumsy shoes" in the last act of *The Merchant of Venice*.[54]

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[50] Koller, *The Theatre Duke,* 105.

[51] Grube, *The Story of the Meininger,* 50.

[52] Grube, *The Story of the Meininger,* 74.

[53] Grube, *The Story of the Meininger,* 74.

[54] In a telegram from Georg to Chronegk of 6 June 1875, quoted and translated in Koller, *The Theatre Duke*, 110.

The costuming for *Julius Caesar* (premiered in Meiningen in 1870 and toured 1874-1890, one of their most successful productions), is telling in a number of ways. Georg worked with Weiss to understand the early-Roman way of draping togas and the women's garments, which involved much more fabric and more complicated folding and wrapping than what was usually seen onstage at the time.[55] He also wanted the audience to know the pains to which he had gone to provide visual accuracy: for various productions, a notice was either sent to the local newspapers or handed out with the program which explained "'The *mise-en-scène* of Julius Caesar is the product of a visit by the Duke to Rome in 1869'; the programme explicitly stated that the costumes were based on the work of Weiss."[56] Historical accuracy ran into trouble, however, in the person of guest actor Ludwig Dessoir, playing Brutus for the premier, who was rather short and stout. Fellow-actor Siegward Freidmann (playing Cassius) recalled:

> Our Berlin togas [from another production of *Julius Caesar*] were on the order of a middle-size coffee-table cover. With terror I remember the size of the Meiningen monster. This real toga measured thirty ells, was of heavy woolen material, and weighed – I don't know how much![…] With my slenderness and twenty-eight years, I soon managed. Indeed I found the unusual constraint that the bulk and weight of the real garment laid on me truly useful. My too lively movements were profitably rendered more difficult and therefore curbed. My Cassius was more commanding, more sedate, more Roman. I believe I never played the role better […]
>
> [But] with his mighty skull, his broad upper body, and his short legs, [Dessoir] looked in the padding of the Meiningen authenticity like a Roman nutcracker wrapped in swaddling clothes. As he viewed himself in the mirror, he laughed out loud. I burst out in laughter too, and the dresser also […] After a long consultation, we cut enough from the togas so that Brutus would not make a comic appearance.[57]

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[55] "Weiss … had a long session with the actors showing hem how to wear the mantle, the toga, the tunic, and the peplum. And instead of making the women's garments in the customary two parts, a long skirt with a separate blouse, Weiss used a one-piece garment, longer than the length from shoulder to floor, then bloused the upper part over a belt so that the garment fell in natural folds." Koller, *The Theatre Duke*, 149n.

[56] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 89

[57] Quoted and translated in Koller, *The Theatre Duke*, 107.

Clearly, communicating the right tone for the character (in this case, tragedy rather than comedy) was more important than strict accuracy.

In addition, Freidmann notes the influence of the "accurate" costume on his performance as Cassius: for him the costume was useful in understanding the attributes, physical and otherwise, of the character. This strategy is perhaps even more obvious in "the anecdote of Ludwig Barnay's leather boots [which] illustrates very tellingly the way in which, by control of costume, the Duke, as director, secured greater control over interpretation," as Osborne asserts.[58] Ludwig Barnay's first role with the Meiningen was Petruchio in the 1873 *Taming of the Shrew*. He arrived with a pair of thigh-high leather boots, which were common usage for Petruchio's costume on other German stages: "it was customary to express the masculinity which this rôle required with the aid of the military dress of the Thirty Years War."[59] However, Georg insisted that Barnay wear the Elizabethan costume he had designed, including stockings and low shoes; according to DeHart, this forced Barnay to develop a more subtle acting style in which "he could tame the Shrew as well in a genteel costume as he could in coarse clothing, swinging his whip wildly."[60] Though there was apparently some friction at the time, Barnay later wrote that "thanks to this purely external element the style of my interpretation imperceptibly

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[58] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre*, 163.

[59] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 163.
[60] DeHart, *The Meininger Theatre*, 30.

Fig. 2: Ludwig Barnay as Antony in Julius Caesar, showing the voluminous "real toga"

underwent a transformation, and came, perhaps, to correspond more closely to the dramatist's intentions."[61] It is hard to say whether the Duke consciously used costume to manipulate actors, as Osborne implies, or whether the view of costume's usefulness as an acting tool can only be ascribed to Freidmann and Barnay; in either case, while Georg left most communication with and coaching of performers to Chronegk, this was one way in which he did directly affect acting performances.

Julius Caesar also demonstrates the way that Georg used costume, set, and lighting design together. To achieve a striking effect when Caesar's ghost appears in

[61] Quoted and translated in Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 163. Barnay wrote this in his autobiography published 1903.

Brutus' tent in Act IV, "the tent was made of dark red velvet material and a passage-way was made in its rear wall with an opening at chest height. Caesar, dressed in a toga of the same red velvet material, was picked out by a light from the front as he appeared in the opening, so that he seemed to be hovering in mid air."[62] This *coup-de-théâtre* which "made the public momentarily shudder" in the words of one reviewer,[63] was possible only through the coordination among design elements, still relatively rare even on stages which embraced historical realism.[64] In later years, Georg was known for stage pictures that functioned as carefully-balanced works of art, in which the costumes played an important part in the composition: at a performance of Schiller's *Die Räuber*, "The famous painter Camphausen […] whispered to his neighbour, 'I don't know what it is, but there is some colour missing from this scene which would make it complete.' In a few minutes he said, 'I have it; there should be some white in the picture.' At that very moment the door opened and Hermann entered, dressed from head to foot in a white Croatian cloak."[65]

Georg's use of design elements together reflected one of the key features of the Meininger's work, the notion of the ensemble, which was also evident in the relation of the costumes to each other. He developed all the costume designs as a unit, paying

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[62] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 105.

[63] From the *Münchner Nachrichten und Anzeiger*, 1 July 1883. Quoted and translated in Koller, *The Theatre Duke,* 101.

[64] "Stage-designers during the earlier part of the nineteenth century [...] had, by and large, been content to maintain the separation between actor and set, as figure and ground." Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 38. For accounts of this separation on the English Stage, see Martin Meisel, *Realizations: narrative, pictorial, and theatrical arts in nineteenth-century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[65] This is an account by Meiningen actor Aloys Prasch, quoted and translated in Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 38.

personal attention to each individual extra and to low-status characters as well as aristocratic heroes.[66] No exceptions were given for stars: even for a leading character, such as the title role in *The Maid of Orleans*, "her whole costume, though clearly prepared with great attention to detail, was not such as to make her stand out from an ensemble of performers whose costume had been designed to match."[67] English contemporaries noted this as one of the ways in which Georg improved upon Kean: when the Meininger toured London in 1881, the *Athenaeum* wrote that "the principal gain [over English actor-managers] is in the manner in which those who are little or nothing more than supernumeraries wear the costumes of a bygone age, and take intelligent part in actions and movements."[68] It is an open question, however, whether costume supported the acting ensemble, or whether the acting troupe was rather an evolution of the production design. André Antoine believed disapprovingly "that the principal criteria in the recruitment of actors seemed to be physical and visual, in particular the ability of the actor to display the Meiningen costumes to the best advantage."[69] Chronegk admitted that physical appearance was a factor in casting Josef Nesper as Caesar: he was considered an unusual choice for the role because of his youth, but he resembled the image of Caesar familiar from coins and artifacts of the period.[70] There is also a hint that

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[66] Grube recalls that the Duke designed an individual costume for every member of the shabby crowd in *The Robbers*, and that newly-made costumes were distressed rather than using old cast-offs to create a worn-in effect. Grube, *The Story of the Meininger,* 86.

[67] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 161.

[68] Quoted in A. M. Nagler, *A source book in theatrical history* (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 499. This praise was hard-won, as many reviews defensively claimed the Meininger's work was little more than imitation of the English tradition, especially Kean.

[69] Summarized in Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 167.

[70] Obsorne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 107.

costume considerations impacted Georg's staging decisions: during rehearsals for Kleist's *Der Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* (1878), Georg instructed Chronegk that "The eight ladies-in-waiting with the new costumes must be so placed that they can be properly seen and they must not hide themselves. The most beautiful outfits are those of Frau Bittner and Fräulein Brückmüller."[71] It seems quite likely that the Meiningen emphasis on ensemble acting (meaning no stars) reflected Georg's commitment to the stage picture above all, rather than vice versa.

Reviews of the Meiningen's reliance on spectacular effect were mixed: a sampling of the Berlin reviews of the first tour in 1874[72] reveals many of the same concerns which surfaced about Kean's work, namely that the visuals would overwhelm the text and the actor. While design was clearly important to Georg and popular with his audiences, it was still looked down upon as a "low" part of the performance compared with "high" art elements like text and acting. As Berlin critic Paul Lindau wrote, "This exaggeration in the treatment of the external aspects would destroy the stage if it became generally accepted. The form that is shown to us is so visually captivating that one no

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[71] Quoted and translated in Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 134. This is actually from Ellen's transcription of Georg's comments during the rehearsal, which were then passed on to Chronegk for execution.

[72] In Berlin 1874, the Meiningen performed *Julius Caesar, Twelfth Night, The Merchant of Venice,* Björnson's *Between the Battles*, Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire*, Minding's *Papst Sixtus V* and Lindner's *Bluthochzeit*. Many of these reviews were written after the critic had seen all of the performances and apply to the Meiningen's work as a whole rather than to one particular show.

longer asks about a play's content."[73] Hans Hopfen of the *Neue Freie Presse* chimed in, especially concerned about the actor's primacy: as he saw it, for the Meiningen "it is not the actor who counts, but the archaeologist, the historian, the scene painter, the tailor, the machinist, and the stage-manager. The stage has become a peepshow, an exhibition of rare objects, a museum, a waxworks. This is no longer a tragedy, but a spectacle."[74] Critic Karl Frenzel differed, however, arguing that the Meiningen merely utilized historical and visual material in order to more fully present the play: "It is not the tailor or the scenery painter, not the much-acclaimed costume book of our learned Professor Weiss – that they give us a dramatist's creation in well-rounded and complete fashion: that is the secret of the Meininger."[75] The *Berliner Bürger Zeitung* countered the criticism of making actors secondary by arguing that the Meininger were forging a new kind of drama, which "is something quite different, something quite new, it is the realization of a principle, namely that art must be higher than the artist."[76] Perhaps most significant were Theodor Fontane's comments on *Wallensteins Tod*: "[there] are new costumes of corresponding magnificence and completeness [...] But all this is not dead ballast. There is not a trace of overdressing as was so feared; in fact, all this elevates the soul of the viewer. The great transformation that the new art of staging all externals has

[73] Quoted and translated in DeHart, *The Meiningen Theatre*, xi. It is worth noting that Lindau eventually changed his opinion about the Meiningen, and in fact took over Chronekg's post after his death, serving as Intendant from 1895-1899.

[74] In his review of 30 May 1874, quoted and translated in Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 68.

[75] Quoted and translated in DeHart, *The Meiningen Theatre*, xi.

[76] Article of 3 May 1874, quoted and translated in Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 68.

made, the heightening of the audience's understanding and interest, is never more apparent."[77]

Fontane seems to get closest to understanding Georg's belief that "There is more to art than the titillation of the senses. It is there to awaken all the noble powers of mankind."[78] Responding to Paul Lindau a few years after his scathing review of the Meiningen's first tour, the Duke wrote, "This I can assure you: that for me the picturesque of the outfitting is not the important consideration in respect to a poetic work. On the contrary, I am inalterably opposed to any tendency to concentrate on externals."[79] This seems hard to reconcile with his method of working from the outside in (sketches of the stage picture before rehearsals began) and the resulting lavish productions; however, there is a potential distinction in whether or not these "externals" serve the "poetic work" and help to "awaken all the noble powers" of the spectator. Georg seems to argue, as the Naturalist movement would fully articulate a decade or so later, that the artistic function of drama can be accessed through the right kind of "externals": as Monks summarizes,

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[77] Quoted and translated in Koller, *The Theatre Duke,* 174. Fontane was a critic active in Berlin at this period, but Koller takes this quotation from his memoirs published in 1926, in which he reprints some of his reviews from the 1870s. It seems from context that Fontane wrote this at the time of the production, but without access to this German text myself, it is possible that this is his reassessment of the Meininger's achievements in the twentieth century.

[78] In a letter Georg wrote to his mother, undated. Quoted and translated in Koller, *The Theatre Duke,* 89. It must predate her death in 1888.

[79] Georg's letter to Paul Lindau of 23 Oct 1879. Quoted and translated in Koller, *The Theatre Duke,* 85. It is worth noting that these two quotes, taken together, are strongly reminiscent of a passage in Wagner's *Opera and Drama* (published 1851): in his critique of current opera and Meyerbeer in particular, Wagner writes that "the externals of Art are turned into its essence; and this essence we find to be – *Effect*, the absolute Effect, i.e. the stimulus of an artificial love-titillation, without the potence of an actual taste of Love." Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 99. It is very probable that Georg II would have read *Opera and Drama*, and so would Paul Lindau, as educated men of the German theatre. More research is necessary to determine Wagner's possible influence on Georg's work in Meiningen.

"Naturalist artists believed in the ability of accurate objects to bring about insight into wider social truths. Truth could be diagnosed through and beneath the exterior form of things."[80] It is important to note, therefore, that Georg would not subordinate realism to pictorial effect: he "discontinued the beloved and common tableau vivant, in which a moment before the curtain fell, the actors arranged themselves in a 'beautiful picture'" because he thought the effect unrealistic.[81] Georg used visual elements in order "to awaken all the noble powers of mankind" rather than for sensual "titillation" like tableaux moments – that is, the design served a higher artistic purpose. As Osborne points out, however, "it must have been exceedingly difficult for public and critics alike to make the fairly subtle kind of distinction – which was clearly a fundamental one for Georg II – between serious and responsible historicism, *Meiningertum*, and the sensuous and superficial *Meiningerei* which the Duke himself recognized and condemned in a number of his contemporaries."[82] Audiences often perceived Meiningen productions as extreme realism with no interpretive filter,[83] and the lavishness of Meiningen design was often justified with the same arguments about audience education or realizing the playwright's intention used by the earlier English school of historical design. Georg's work marks a subtle but important shift in focus, however, from education to art.

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[80] Monks, *The Actor in Costume*, 66.

[81] Koller, *The Theatre Duke,* 130.

[82] Osborne, *The Meiningen Court Theatre,* 27.

[83] Perhaps the most extreme example of perceived realism is in their production of Albert Linder's *Bluthochzeit*: "the Meininger used scented candles to represent the poison[ed candles in the scene]. The scent, which drifted out into the audience, reportedly caused a Berlin banker to fear for his safety when he smelled it. Turning to his wife, he cried, 'Come, Sarah, let's get out of here; otherwise they'll poison you, too.'" Quoted in DeHart, *The Meininger Theatre,* 88-89.

Richard Wagner: the essential problem of materiality

> To us laymen of the present day there perhaps is little more appalling than a visit to our actors' dressing-rooms just before the commencement of a stage-performance, especially if we are seeking out a friend with whom an hour previously we had chatted in the street. And here the least deterrent are the hideous old or crippled masks, whereas the young heroes and lovers with their false curls, their painted cheeks and over-dressy costumes, may easily fill us with positive horror. From the feeling of extreme depression, that always came over me on such occasions, nothing but a sudden stroke of magic could ever free me: and that was when, from out the distance, I heard at last the *orchestra*. Then did my halting pulses re-win life: everything withdrew before me to the sphere of wonder-dreams; the pandemonium seemed to me redeemed: for the eye no longer saw in terrible distinctness a wholly unintelligible reality.
>
> --Richard Wagner, "Letter to an Actor" (1873)[84]

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) experienced the problem of costume overwhelming the text even more intensely than some of his contemporaries: for Wagner, it was not merely spectacular or detailed historical costumes, but all material stage garments, which seemed to hold a "terrible distinctness" that jarred the "wonder-dreams" he wanted to create onstage. While a turn away from the material world, or an ignorance of fashion, might not be surprising in an artist dedicated to myth, Wagner's career-long struggle with costume is complicated by his simultaneous fascination with sumptuous garments. Wagner was deeply invested in costume but also frustrated by it; he sought a new kind of abstract costume design to match his revolutionary music-dramas. He wanted the costumes to convey truth, but of a new kind – an artistic truth of essences rather than history or realism. Wagner's costumes show an attempt to use the material to represent the immaterial.

Wagner, who grew up in a theatrical family, writes early in his autobiography of his fascination with the material theatre and with costume in particular: "Everything connected with a theatrical performance had for me the charm of mystery, it both

[84] Wagner, "Letter to an Actor," trans. William Ashton Ellis, in *Actors and Singers* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 259.

bewitched and fascinated me […] the more elegant contents of my sisters' wardrobes, in the beautifying of which I had often seen the family occupied, exercised a subtle charm over my imagination; nay, my heart would beat madly at the very touch of one of their dresses."[85] While claims of Wagner's cross-dressing are undoubtedly overblown,[86] he clearly had both a deep appreciation for, and a thorough knowledge of, fabric and clothing construction. The now-notorious letters to his seamstress Berthe Goldwag (published in the *Neue Freie Presse* in 1877) demonstrate an astonishingly comprehensive command of cut, patterning, stitching, and fabric. Wagner's order for a dressing gown communicates a detailed sense of the garment: "Use six widths for a very wide hem. Add a separate – not sewed on to the quilting! – shirred ruffle of the same material, going all around the hem; from the waist downward this ruffle should increase in width, forming a shirred insertion to finish off the front." He clearly understands patternmaking, specifying "The shoulders narrower, so that the sleeves won't sag, you

[85] Richard Wagner, *My Life* [trans. unknown] (Cirencester, England: Echo Library, 2005), 14. While it is a bit unclear in this quote, it is likely that Wagner is referring to his sisters' professional wardrobes (they were both actresses).

[86] Rumors about Wagner wearing effeminate or female clothing have circulated since the publication of the Goldwag letters in 1877, but were largely discredited due to the overtly partisan motivation behind their publication (instigated by Wagner's professional enemy Johann Brahms). Recently, the theory has resurfaced and gained momentum with the publication of Wagner's correspondence with Italian dress-maker Gaetano Ghezzi: Stewart Spencer, "Wagner and Gaetano Ghezzi" in *The Wagner Journal* 1:1 (March 2007), 18-32. The garments ordered were purportedly for Wagner's second wife Cosima, but some believe they were for Wagner himself, most vigorously Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 142-143. Many scholars agree, however, that the modern label "transvestite" is inappropriate for Wagner, since most of the reliable documentation describes Wagner wearing luxurious or effeminate versions of male garments (especially indoor or night-time clothing like dressing gowns) rather than female clothes per se. See especially Michael Saffle, "Wagner's 'Letters to a Seamstress': Cross-Dressing, Egoism and Polmorhous Perversity," in *Gender Blending*, eds. Bonnie Bullough, Vern Bullough and James Elias (Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), 256; and John Barker, *Wagner and Venice* (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 294.

understand."[87] In a later letter, he explains, "I am returning to you the larger pink satin sample; I should like to order 100 yards of this, but it should have a smoother texture, like the green sample; not so twilled, but quite open, which makes for a finer luster."[88] This knowledge of different weaving techniques and the way that they interact with light is striking; Wagner may have gained this expertise from his study of fabrics in the theatre. The clarity and specificity of these letters make it all the more strange that Wagner had such a fraught relationship to costume design.

The costume of his operas was supremely important to Wagner from the beginning,[89] but he had difficulty achieving the results he wanted onstage, even later in his career when he had a free hand. Scholar Patrick Carnegy believes this was a failure of vision – "if there was one dark corner in Wagner's total vision of his works it was uncertainty about what his gods, giants and Nibelungs should look like"[90] – but Wagner's difficulties could just as likely be explained by the revolutionary nature of what he was trying to do. Unlike Georg II, Wagner wanted his costumes to be ahistorical, a difficult task to carry out in the historically-saturated visual style of theatre of the period, which could indeed be described as having a "terrible distinctness." He also had to contend with more financial and audience pressure than Georg, and more collaboration in the design

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[87] Letter of 1 Feb 1867. Richard Wagner, *Wagner and the Seamstress*. Trans. Sophie Prombaum. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1941), 36-37.

[88] 30 March 1867. *Wagner and the Seamstress*, 44-45.

[89] Wagner cancelled the premiere of his first opera, *Die Feen*, in Leipzig 1834, because the producing theatre would not costume it as he wanted, insisting upon Orientalist garb instead of the early medieval period he desired: "I fought against the insufferable turban and kaftan costumes and demanded energetically the knightly garb typifying the earliest period of the middle ages." Wagner, *My Life,* 69.

[90] Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 48.

process. Wagner always worked with a costume designer rather than sketching himself, a more common model in opera than in theatre at this time; problems arose several times because he initially approved the designer's sketches, but was then dissatisfied when he saw the finished garments onstage.

Heinrich Porges, who served as Wagner's assistant and record keeper during rehearsals for the 1876 Ring Cycle premier, wrote that what Wagner "was striving to convey was the essence of the nature of the world, the essence underlying external realities perceived by the senses. The characteristic which stamps the style of *The Ring of the Nibelung* is that here an undreamt-of super-reality (*Überwirklichkeit*) is given life and shape."[91] This moves from Georg's proto-Naturalism (revealing higher truth through exactly accurate objects) to something more like Symbolism, where physical objects on stage do not so much represent as connote other-worldly truths, using material objects only as much as absolutely necessary to access a higher, metaphysical plane. Carnegy sees Symbolist philosophy in Wagner's essay "Religion and Art" (1880), summarizing, "Wagner argues that religion diminishes symbols by treating them as embodiments of an absolute, revealed truth. His case appears to be that dogmatic interpretation is the antithesis of art, which uses symbols as a gateway to truths which go far beyond the tenets of any particular religion."[92] The issue of embodiment, or the lack thereof, may shed light on Wagner's problem with approving costume sketches but rejecting the finished result: for Wagner, once the costumes were on material bodies, the garments could no longer be abstract, suggestive symbols.

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[91] Heinrich Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the Ring: an eye-witness account of the stage rehearsals of the first Bayreuth Festival*, trans. Robert L. Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

[92] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre,* 108.

The evolution of the costumes for the first Ring Cycle, which opened the Bayreuth festival theatre in 1876, provides perhaps the best case study. The first two Ring operas were provisionally premiered in Munich as soon as they were finished (*Das Rheingold* in 1869 and *Die Walküre* in 1870), at the insistence of Wagner's demanding patron Ludwig II of Bavaria. Wagner was not present for the rehearsals, but he did have some say in choosing the production team, selecting Franz Seitz to do the costumes.[93] The entire production design was inspired by frescos commissioned by Ludwig II from painter Michael Echter in 1865-66, which were done in Ludwig's strictly historical taste. Carnegy writes that these paintings were made "in consultation with Wagner,"[94] but Wagner later seemed dissatisfied with them, writing that he wanted "characteristic costumes for this ancient Germanic world of gods… my initial objection to the sketches I have been sent is that they show no sense of invention and that (as copies of Echter's frescoes) they include only Greek costumes."[95] As he had done in their previous collaborations, Wagner reviewed and changed Seitz's designs: according to Wagner scholar Oswald Georg Bauer, "Wagner looked over his designs and improved a number of details. They turned out to be simpler and more characterful [sic] than those of the first Bayreuth performances seven years later."[96] Wagner apparently did not share

[93] Wagner had worked with Seitz before on the premieres of *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868).

[94] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre,* 66 (caption).

[95] Letter of 26 July 1869, quoted and translated in Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre,* 64.

[96] Oswald Georg Bauer, *Richard Wagner: The stage designs and productions from the premieres to the present* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 222.

Bauer's assessment, however, because when his festival theatre was finally ready for the official premiere of the finished cycle, he chose a new designer.

In December 1874, Wagner wrote to Carl Emil Doepler,[97] a professor of costume history who had work for the Weimar Court Theatre 1860-1870, inviting him to "undertake the design and superintend the making of the costumes" for the 1876 Ring, and outlining what he had in mind:

> To give you some preliminary idea of the character of the task, I send you a copy of the dramatic poem, together with certain pamphlets relating to its performance…
>
> I regard the problem I have set as offering a rich field for invention, for I actually ask no less than a characteristic picture made up of individual human figures, which will call up before our eyes with arresting vividness the people and events of a bygone culture far removed from the world of our experience. You will also discover very speedily that medieval conceptions of the figures of the Nibelungenlied, which have gained a certain measure of acceptance through the work of Cornelius, Schnorr and others, must be altogether set aside in this instance. On the other hand, recent study of the attempts to illustrate specifically northern mythology reveals that the artists have taken refuge in mere reproduction of the classical antique with certain supposedly characteristic modifications. The intimations to be found in Roman writers who came into contact with Germanic peoples as of the costume of the latter do not appear as yet to have found a practical application.[98]

Unfortunately this suggestion about Roman accounts of ancient Germanic peoples proved to be something of a red herring – Doepler became too concerned with the accurate historical representation of these tribes, producing "designs encrusted with ornamental detail that were exactly the kind of decorative kitsch which the composer was so anxious to avoid."[99] As Katherine Syer writes, Wagner "was far less bound up with the growing trend toward historical detail in set and costume design than were many of his

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[97] Sometimes also credited as Döpler.

[98] Quoted in Cook's introduction to Doepler's memoir. Carl Emil Doepler, *A Memoir of Bayreuth, 1876*, trans. Peter Cook (London: the S.P.A. Limited in association Peter Cook, 1979), 22.

[99] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre,* 83.

contemporaries and successors… This lack of visual fussiness was part of his basic premise that matters of design should not be distracting for their own sake. The goal was always to convey a somewhat dreamlike world."[100] Carnegy concurs, explaining that Wagner's "scenes were not the virtuoso exercises in 'historical archaeology' on which the artists and technicians of Paris prided themselves, but pictures of what he had had in mind when composing his texts and music. His were landscapes of the imagination, unbounded by the tyranny of historical exactitude."[101] Of course, it is far easier to create painted backdrops that are "dreamlike" "landscapes of imagination" than to produce the same effect with costumes on physical bodies, which permit only a certain level of abstraction, and may become mixed up with the costume in unexpected ways.[102]

The misunderstanding between Wagner and Doepler is bound up with a Meininger performance they attended of Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht*. Doepler relates that in April 1875, while planning the Ring costumes, he and the Wagners went to see Meininger's production of *Hermannsschlacht* in Berlin:

> [Wagner] invited me to be his guest with reference to the Germanic costumes of this piece, and the well-known historical authenticity for which the Meininger performances had already become legendary. The Master remarked 'There will be lots of things which we can consider, especially the realistic manner of scene production and so much of that which has been through the master minds of the high guardians of the Meininger and come to full realization in poetic thought' […] The Master showed himself on this occasion highly susceptible to the picturesque and the decorative element, as well as the costume designs of the things performed. He was enthusiastic and I had to promise him to start without delay on my great task under this recently witnessed impression.[103]

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[100] Katherine Syer, "From Page to Stage: Wagner as 'Regisseur,'" *Richard Wagner and his World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 14.

[101] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre,* 40.

[102] As Aoife Monks puts it, "costume is that which is perceptually indistinct from the actor's body [when worn], and yet something that can be removed. Costume is a body that can be taken off." Monks, *The Actor in Costume,* 11.

[103] Doepler, *A Memoir of Bayreuth*, 24-25

Carnegy believes this to be a misapprehension, writing that "Doepler was so deeply in thrall to the historical realism of the Meiningen theatre that he modeled his *Ring* costumes directly on the Meiningen company's production of Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht* […] The Wagners thought badly of the archaeological exactitude of the Meiningen costumes, which in their view distorted the play."[104] Cosima Wagner wrote in her diary, "in the evening with Prof. Doepler, our costume designer, to see *Die Hermannsschlacht*, performed by the Meiningen company; the play very gripping in spite of many peculiarities, and the acting very remarkable [...] the historic realism of the costumes distorted it into a farce."[105] It is hard to know if her husband shared this opinion, but it does seem that by asking Doepler to "*consider* the realistic manner of scene production" he was not necessarily endorsing the Meininger's historicism. In fact, his comment that the material "had been through the master minds of the high guardians of the Meininger and come to full realization in poetic thought," suggests that Wagner recognized the subtle way in which Georg used historical material for his own artistic ends;[106] perhaps it was this artistic filter which he wanted Doepler to imitate.

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[104] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre,* 83.

[105] Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 1:841. Entry of 17 April 1875.

[106] Because of the friendship between their wives, Wagner and Georg II knew each other personally. Cosima records the four of them meeting on several occasions for dinner and artistic discussion. Georg loaned the Meiningen state orchestra to Wagner in 1876 to form the core of the Bayreuth festival orchestra; this means that Georg, who would have been paying the musicians yearly salaries, was in this way a very important patron of the 1876 Bayreuth festival. Doepler writes that Georg visited the during the Ring rehearsal period and "recognized" several costume pieces as drawn from historical sources which he had also used. Doepler, *A Memoir of Bayreuth*, 44.

The divergence in opinion appeared to be resolved by that summer, however: according to Doepler's memoirs, when he first showed the Wagners his figurines (his word for costume sketches) in the summer of 1875, "they received the complete approval of the Master and Frau Cosima […] to my great joy he declared himself completely at one with my characterisation of the single figures."[107] Problems started to surface when the Wagners saw the costumes made up, about a year later; Cosima recorded on 6 March 1876, "We then drive to Doepler's house and look at his lovely costumes for the *Ring* […] I myself should have preferred a more mystical impression, everything too clearly defined visually is to my mind detrimental to the effect of the music and the tragic action, but if the visual aspect must be emphasized, it could not be done more beautifully or artistically."[108]

Friction during the rehearsal process is largely recorded by Cosima in her diary; she often claims to speak for her husband, but this is hard to determine. Doepler attributes much of the conflict during the Ring process to Cosima alone: "I was never in disagreement with Richard Wagner in anything that concerned his great work, but I was so with his wife, who had a tendency to use all manner of impressions which she obtained from the rich supply of 'Brochure material.'"[109] Doepler and Cosima each accuse the other of too much historicism. Doepler explains that this "brochure material" dear to Cosima was inaccurate or inappropriate historical detail which she kept asking Doepler to include: for example, she apparently read that a certain blue was not a

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[107] Doepler, *A Memoir of Bayreuth,* 27.

[108] *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, 1:896-897. Entry of 6 March 1876. It is unclear in this quote, but it seems most likely that they were seeing the actual garments, rather than sketches, at this time.

[109] Doepler, *A Memoir of Bayreuth,* 41.

historical color of the early middle ages, and suggested that Doepler should change the blue costumes to black, after costume rehearsals had already begun. Doepler refused on dramaturgical (rather than historical or practical) grounds, saying that "I have used it only with all those figures to do with Wälsungs, and besides the Master himself [Wagner] is demanding a blue coat for Wotan. The colours which are so important for the characterisation of individual figures do not allow me to omit the blue."[110] Cosima, however, criticizes Doepler's work as "an archaeologist's fantasy, to the detriment of the tragic and mythical elements. I should like everything to be much simpler, more primitive. As it is, it is all mere pretence."[111] After a dress rehearsal on 28 July, she recorded perhaps her most scathing comment: "The costumes are reminiscent throughout of Red Indian chiefs and still bear, along with their ethnographic absurdity, all the marks of provincial tastelessness."[112] She sometimes reports particular pieces or scenes that Wagner was upset about – "R. is having great trouble with Wotan's hat; it is a veritable musketeer's hat!"[113] and "first Rheingold rehearsal in costume, R. very sad afterward" – which may suggest that the more stringent criticism was her own, perhaps motivated by pique after Doepler would not take her suggestions.[114] After the fact, however, Cosima

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[110] Doepler, *A Memoir of Bayreuth,* 41-42.

[111] *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, 1:915. Entry of 13 July 1876.

[112] *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, 1:917. Entry of 28 July 1876.

[113] *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, 1:917. Entry of 28 July 1876.

[114] It is possible to see the Cosima-Doepler conflict as clash of new and old, or amateur/professional, design systems: in an older style of production, which hung on in the smaller theatres, a leading lady was often loosely in charge of overseeing the costumes, whereas the professional (usually male) costume designer became more common in the late nineteenth century, especially at larger and better-funded theatres. Cosima notes in her diary that she helped with costumes for some of Wagner's earlier operas; although it's difficult to know exactly what that meant, she clearly expected to have more input on the Ring designs than Doepler was willing to give her.

wrote that Wagner "agrees with me when I say that all the magic was lost through Doepler's *rags and patches*."[115]

While is unclear how many of Cosima's opinions were shared by Richard Wagner, he was definitely displeased with the costumes in his own right, and sometimes berated Doepler during rehearsals. On 25 June 1876, Wagner apparently made some especially offensive remarks about Doepler during a rehearsal of *Siegfried*, prompting Doepler to write a letter of resignation that evening; according to Doepler, Wagner publicly apologized at the following rehearsal and it was smoothed over.[116] There were also troubles with the cast, some of whom were uncomfortable in their costumes. On this issue, Wagner seems to have backed Doepler: "The eight Walkyries complained about the weight of their shields and the noisy tingle made by their small metal decorations [...] Wagner called out in an almost furious voice 'What, you want to be Walkyries and you cannot endure this little bit of tingling? [...] And concerning the weight of the shields, you will, considering the many rehearsals ahead, get used to them in time.'"[117] Both Doepler and choreographer Richard Fricke report frequent arguments amongst the designers, especially with Carl Brandt, the machinist or technical director.[118]

A comparison of Doepler's sketches with photographs of the singers in the finished costumes may shed some light on the Wagners' dissatisfaction. Comparing the 1876 Sieglinde sketch and photo, the sketch depicts a lighter weight fabric for the dress,

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[115] *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, 1:949. Entry of 23 Feb 1877.

[116] Doepler, *A Memoir of Bayreuth,* 35-36.

[117] Doepler, *A Memoir of Bayreuth,* 39.

[118] See Richard Fricke, *Wagner in Rehearsal, 1875-1876: The diaries of Richard Fricke*, trans. George R. Fricke (New York: Pendragon Press, 1998).

whereas the skirt of the actual costume is either heavy fabric or is worn over a heavier petticoat. The cloak present in the sketch is missing from the photo, but may have been used in another scene during the production. The tied belt, which appears functional in the sketch, looks quite odd in the photo, hanging down so far that it becomes more like an ornament and clearly is not holding the garment together. The Brünnhilde costume shows similar changes. As with Sieglinde, the skirt is fuller and heavier, as is the cloak, which hangs at the back of the costume rather than being drawn across the chest with the ornate gold clasp as in the sketch. While the body posture is quite different, is seems unlikely that the actual fabrics could convey the feeling of flight and lightness present in the sketch, even while in motion onstage. From the way the fabric falls in the sketch, it is clear that Doepler had silk in mind; since cheaper synthetic substitutes were not available in 1876, it is possible that the change to heavier fabric was due to economic constraints. However, it could also be that Wagner thought the sketch too Classical and wanted a more Teutonic, medieval feeling.

Fig. 3: Doepler's sketch for Sieglinde

Fig. 4: Josephine Scheffsky in the role

Fig. 5: Doepler's sketch for Brünnhilde

Fig. 6: Amalie Materna in the role

Fig. 7: Doepler's sketch for Alberich

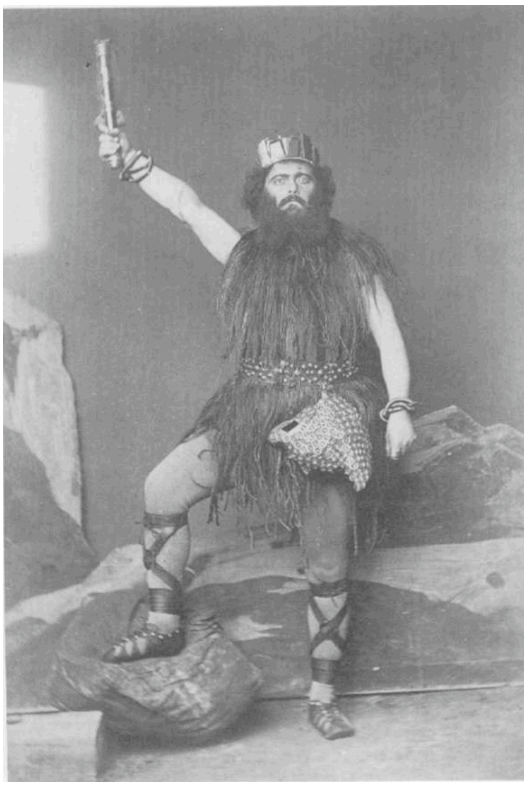

Fig. 8: Karl Hill in the role

The costume for the antagonist Alberich may add credence to this idea. This costume changed considerably, as the sketch shows a banded metal breastplate and greaves (armored leg coverings), whereas the actual costume is made up entirely of shaggy fur or hair. The greaves also seem to have been shortened or removed, so that more of the leg is visible in the finished garment. Arguably, the effect is to make the costume "simpler, more primitive" in feeling, as Cosima Wagner requested; removing or covering the metal armor also tones down the Classical feeling that Richard Wagner disliked.

The presence of actual bodies is also a factor in the costume discrepancies. With Brünnhilde and Alberich, there is a noticeable difference in body type between the sketch and the actual performer – Materna is shorter and heavier than the figure in the sketch,

and Hill does not sport the bulging arm muscles with which Doepler endowed Alberich. These disparities seem to have been acceptable to Wagner, who admitted to some consideration of physical appearance in casting: he wrote in 1878 that "many a firstrate singer had I to leave unbidden [to Bayreuth], since I desired none but tall and imposing figures for my Gods, Giants and Heroes."[119] The presence of women's bodies, in particular, seems to have shifted the effect of costumes for Wagner: he had endless trouble with the Flowermaidens in *Parsifal*, approving sketches and then, when seeing the costumes worn, finding them indecent.[120] The heavier fabrics of the female costumes for the Ring may be a concession to decency, as the light silks of the sketches may have revealed too much of the performers' bodies.

In terms of characterization, Doepler's sketches and the actual costumes show strong use of primary colors: blue and red predominate, with some use of yellow and green. This bold, limited palette creates the feeling of epic opposing forces. The color, however, is not as clearly schematic as Doepler represented to Cosima; he told her that he used blue for the Wälsungs only, which is not the case, since the Rhinemaidens and some of the Valkyries also have blue costumes. Red is used confusingly, also: it predominates in both costumes for Brünnhilde (the heroine of the piece who redeems the world through love), but is also prominent in costumes of Loge (the trickster fire god), Donner (the thunder god), and Gunter (the evil king who drugs Siegfried into forgetting his wife Brünnhilde). Siegmund and Sieglinde both wear fur overtunics, which associates them as

[119] Richard Wagner, "The Festivals of 1876," an article which appeared in the *Bayreuther Blätter* in December 1878. Richard Wagner, *Religion and Art,* trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 105-06.

[120] Bauer, *Richard Wagner,* 276

siblings and lovers (and perhaps reminds us of their "wolf" father, Wotan in disguise), but fur is also extensively used on Fafner, Alberich, Mime, and other Nibelungs. It seems probable that, in the use of color and fabric, Doepler was thinking more about creating each overall stage picture (for example, having both blue and red elements present all the time) and less about consistency of individual characterization.

The cut and imagery of the costumes are surprisingly Grecian, especially the women's costumes – Sieglinde, Fricka and Freia wear light, pleated, full-length tunics with over-dresses or draping that look remarkably like Greek chitons, and the ornamental details on these costumes are reminiscent of Greek key designs. The mail shirts worn by Brünnhilde and the other Valkyries resemble Greek male battle dress. If these costumes are less Greek than the originals, in response to Wagner's criticisms, then the first drafts of the 1869 and 1870 costumes must have been very Classical indeed. The wing imagery used throughout, especially on headgear, may also hark back to Classical depictions of Hermes, although bird wings were also fashionable on ladies' clothing of the 1870s.

What Doepler's costumes do have, however, is a visual consistency, especially in the limited use of color and fabric (light silk, fur, and chain mail are used repeatedly), and consistency of line (almost all the women wear long tunics with overdresses, all the men wear short tunics and tights, and nearly everyone has a long cloak). While Grecian influence is definitely present, they are not copies of Greek historical dress; the mixture of rougher textures and some of the ornamentation are Doepler's invention. Taken together, the sketches do create a world of the play which is neither completely new nor completely historical; they seem to make a strong attempt to satisfy Wagner's original request that the costumes "call up before our eyes with arresting vividness the people and

events of a bygone culture far removed from the world of our experience."[121] The absence of schematic use of color also moves away from Naturalism's legibility of the body[122] and away from the "absolute, dogmatic"[123] interpretation of symbols, which Wagner disliked: for the spectator, there are many ways of interpreting these costumes. Writing mostly about Wagner's music, Theodor Adorno claimed that Wagner worked with a "stratum of subject-matter that acknowledges neither history nor the supernatural nor even the natural, but which lies beyond all such categories. Essence is drawn into an omnisignificant immanence; the immanent is held in thrall by symbols. This stratum, where all is undifferentiated, is that of myth. Its sign is ambiguity."[124] This mythic ambiguity – or perhaps abstraction – seems to be present in Doepler's costume designs.

Conclusions

In his influential essay on the rise of the director, Bernard Dort argues that "the advent of the director brought about an awareness of the signifying role of the components of a performance… Now the other practitioners in the theatre are demanding a relatively autonomous status and some responsibility for the performance. The text, the playing space, the acting – all are becoming emancipated."[125] As I hope this chapter has

[121] Quoted above in Wagner's first letter to Doepler.

[122] Kirk Williams writes that Naturalism relies on "the irreducibility of the body as a locus of truth and transparency." Kirk Williams, "Anti-Theatricality and the Limits of Naturalism," in *Against Theatre,* eds. Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 101.

[123] From Carnegy's summary of Wagner's argument in "Religion and Art," quoted above.
[124] Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: NLB, 1981), 115.

[125] Bernard Dort, "The Liberated Performance," trans. Barbara Kerslake, *Modern Drama* 25.1 (1982): 65.

shown, this "liberation" or new signifying power was also demanded by costume design. To turn Dort's formulation around, however, there is also a way in which stage design of this period demands the director, rather than vice versa. The power of the material – perhaps especially the material costume, combined with the performing body – required a strong and visionary author to control the total artistic experience in the theatre. Writing in 1885, Oscar Wilde insisted that "archeaeology is only really delightful when transfused into some form of art"[126] and concluded that what was needed was "the conversion of fact into effect."[127]

Georg II began this kind of "transfusion" or "conversion," and Wagner took it a step further. Although Wagner was never completely satisfied with the Ring costumes, it was one of the first widely-seen productions in Europe to openly depart from accuracy or historicism, while still asserting itself as serious drama.[128] Doepler's designs were used on the early-1880s Ring tour of the Richard Wagner Theatre, which established the look of traditional Wagner production throughout Europe; led by impresario Angelo Neumann, it was the largest touring company in Europe, surpassing even the Meiningen Ensemble, and reached eight countries.[129] While Adorno did not mean his comment

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[126] Oscar Wilde, "Shakespeare and Stage Costume," in *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* [London], XVII (January-June 1885): 842. This is the first published version of the essay that was later revised and included in Wilde's 1891 *Intentions* as "The Truth of Masks."

[127] Wilde, 867.

[128] Fantastical costumes were certainly not new, especially in plays drawn from fairy tales or myths, but during the nineteenth-century these kinds of productions were often denigrated as lower-class spectacles or light entertainments suitable for holiday pantomime.

[129] Between 1881-83, they performed in England, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Hungary and Austria, as well as more than 20 cities in Germany (see Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre,* 127). Advertisements and programs for the touring Ring announced that "The wardrobe, weapons and properties were produced according to original designs of Prof. Doepler of Berlin,

about Wagner's "ambiguity" as a compliment, on the level of design, this was an important development. Early-twentieth-century theatre historians Fuerst and Hume write that "with Wagner the setting has become for the first time an actor in the drama. Here the stage decoration acts, it plays a part; something which it had never done before. Moreover, we can find in it a tendency toward psychological expression, toward the creation of a mood."[130] They identify a certain abstraction or "mood," working in the service of the dramaturgy, as the key innovation of Wagner's scenography. This use of costume design to serve the artistic or theatrical experience of legitimate drama, rather than a notion of science or education, opened the door to much more experimental designs to come.

Together these two large German touring companies, the Meiningen Ensemble and the Richard Wagner Theatre, profoundly influenced the development of costume design by, first, calling attention to costumes through meticulous historical realism and unified stage picture, and second, showing that spectacular costumes could be a part of serious drama. Several decades earlier, Wagner critiqued the state of opera production as valuing spectacle for its own sake, or "effect [...] without a cause."[131] In Wagner's conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, however, the opposition between tragedy and spectacle (set up in the Berlin critic's review of the Meininger) breaks down: now, tragedy and spectacle can serve each other as "cause" and "effect." Together, these two

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the weapons and the properties deriving from the renowned workshop of M. Goersch and H. Schneider, purveyors to the Imperial Court theatre of Berlin" (quoted in Bauer, *Richard Wagner,* 187).

[130] Walter Rene Fuerst and Samuel J. Hume, *Twentieth-Century Stage Decoration* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1929), 7.
[131] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 95.

early directors went a long way towards resolving the tension between a view of lavish costumes as "selling out" to mass appeal, and the perception of archaeology as a gentlemanly, educational pursuit that dignified the low theatre art form of theatre; in the Meiningen/Wagner work, costume is neither a populist spectacle nor an educational opportunity, but a functioning part of the drama. While design for its own sake was still far from being validated, in this work it broke free of certain kinds of justification (either box office or scholarly). Aoife Monks writes that in Symbolist aesthetics, "truth is the opposite of accuracy"[132] – partly through the work of these early German directors, costume began to tell an ahistorical artistic truth.

[132] Monks, *The Actor in Costume,* 66.

Annie Holt
Chapter 2

Frocks and Fictions:
Actresses' innovations in nineteenth-century costume design

Costume theorist Paola Bignami points out that "the concept, or rather the signified as well as the signifier, of the combined terms theatrical costume has not stood still but has varied over the course of time."[1] This instability of the referent "theatrical costume" applies not only to historical difference, however, but extends to the varying significance of the same costumes on different performing bodies in a single time period. Although it is relatively well-known that nineteenth-century performers often provided their own stage clothing, not much attention has yet been paid to the interaction of actors' clothing with changes in costume practices. Costume design made significant gains in public interest during this period, with artists and audiences reading stage garments for historical accuracy, realism, and character development in new ways; at the same time, a growing celebrity culture and new visual technologies of reproduction made images of performers, in or out of costume, more widely available and influential.[2] This article considers costumes of the Italian opera singer Marietta Piccolomini and the English actress Ellen Terry, focusing on their visually arresting portrayals of, respectively, Violetta Valèry

[1] Paola Bignami, *Storia del costume teatrale: oggetti per esibirsi nello spettacolo e in società* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2005), 11.

[2] For overviews of costume design history, besides Bignami, see also James Laver, *Costume in the Theatre*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964); Diana de Marly, *Costume on the Stage, 1600-1940*, (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982); Marialuisa Angiolillo, *Storia del costume teatrale in Europa,* (Roma: Lucarini Editore, 1989); and Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

(1855) and Lady Macbeth (1888).[3] These two performers invited audiences to think about the meaning of on-stage garments in new ways, expanding the role of costume as a tool for creating a fictional character; onstage and off, their costume choices mediated between the real and the fictional, and between the public and the private.

Although working in two different genres, Piccolomini and Terry faced similar costume conditions: on both operatic and theatrical stages across Western Europe and America, starring female performers were usually expected (or allowed) to provide their own garments.[4] Considered a privilege by some but a burden by others, an actress' choice of costume was credited to her – critics sometimes commented upon an actress' "dressing" of a role – and portraits or sketches of female performers in costume were popular. In the eighteenth century, female performers used costume to enhance their personal status, wearing opulent garments designed to outshine the competition, and making little differentiation between on- and off-stage apparel; through the use of loaned or copied aristocratic garments, "celebrity circulated via clothing and costume from stage to court and back again"[5] without much attention to the specific requirements of the role.

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[3] While there are many interesting examples of male actors and costume choice, this paper selects two female performers as case studies because of the extra visual scrutiny placed on women in this period, perhaps offering a richer field of interpretation for their sartorial choices.

[4] For background about this, in addition to Bignami, see Tracy Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: their social identity in Victorian culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Alicia Finkel, *Romantic Stages*: *set and costume design in Victorian England* (London: McFarland and Co, Inc., 1996); Katherine Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States,* 1825-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001). Important exceptions to this practice, in the nineteenth century, were operatic premieres at major houses, usually designed by a professional (although the prima donna was sometimes still consulted about her own costumes), and newly-emergent directors' theatres such as the Meininger Ensemble. In the older style of actor-manager-led companies, and in opera productions in smaller houses and on tour, however, female and often male performers supplied their own costumes, sometimes receiving a stipend from the management to pay for necessary new garments.

[5] Martha Nussbaum, "Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1700-1800" in *Theatre and*

In the second half of the nineteenth century, this function of costume began to shift: performers more often used costume to convey information about a particular character they played, and to separate that character from themselves.

Sos Eltis describes the expanding "celebrity machine" of the nineteenth century as "mechanisms [newly] available for creating and marketing a celebrity persona: the explosion of print culture at the end of the 19th century and the attendant proliferation of articles, interviews, and profiles; photography and its cheaply reproducible multiple portraits; the touring circuit."[6] Along these new avenues of circulation, costume design could now function as a self-fashioning tool in more widely-accessible ways than previously; the enhanced amount of images and second-hand testimony also provides scholars better ways into understanding the complex and nuanced situation of costume design, whether actresses left explicit records of their intentions or not.[7]

Celebrity in Britain 1660-2000, eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 159. For example, she notes that "Anne Oldfield purportedly wore the same dress that she had dined in to the theatre [i.e. onstage] later in the evening" and Queen Maria Beatrice of Modena (wife of James II) loaned her coronation robes to actress Elizabeth Barry for a stage role (159). For further information on eighteenth-century actresses and costumes, see Sos Eltis, "Reputation, Celebrity and the Late-Victorian Actress" in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000,* eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Laura Engle "The Muff Affair: Fashioning Celebrity in the Portraits of Late-Eighteenth-Century British Actresses" in *Fashion Theory* 13:3 (2009); and Aileen Ribeiro, "Costuming the Part: A discourse of fashion and fiction in the image of the actress in England, 1776-1812" in *Notorious Muse: the actress in British art and culture, 1776-1812,* ed. Robyn Asleson (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2003).

[6] Eltis, "Reputation, Celebrity and the Late-Victorian Actress," 170-171.

[7] The two case studies presented in this article are quite different in this respect. Piccolomini left no written records of her intentions or commentary about her costumes, as far as I have been able to find. Terry, on the other hand, wrote an autobiography which comments on her costumes, as well as an annotated script for the 1888 *Macbeth*; her costume collaborator, Alice Comyns Carr, also wrote an autobiography detailing this costume design process. Even when documentation exists, however, intentionality is a slippery issue; the main argument of this paper is concerned with how audiences read Piccolomini's and Terry's costumes in new ways, and with visual analysis of the costume images themselves, rather than with the performers' stated or tacit

Technological advances of the industrial revolution – the sewing machine, and in England, the mechanized weaving of cotton and wool – also changed the valence of garments, both on and off the stage. Access to ready-made articles of clothing, to technologies that produced clothes more quickly, and to information about the prevailing modes accelerated the fashion cycle and greatly expanded the opportunities for personal choice in apparel, for a wide section of the population. Sociologist Richard Sennett identifies a major shift in the function of European clothing between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: whereas eighteenth-century clothing was an impersonal marker of one's place in society, chosen only in a very limited sense, during the nineteenth century garments became emotionally and symbolically invested, coming to "express" the individual's personality (an emerging concept at this time).[8] As denizens of London or Paris began to scrutinize each others' clothing for clues to the wearer's interiority, many people adopted dark, neutral clothing as a protective shield to obscure their circumstances from prying eyes. According to Sennett, this new way of thinking about clothing as expressive, combined with the rise of department stores carrying ready-to-wear and the homogenizing influence of printed fashion plates, paradoxically led to an extremely subtle and limited visual field: because clothing *could* mean more, individuals tried to express less. Sennett argues, however, that this situation was reversed on the nineteenth-century stage, which adopted and extended garments' symbolic potential (as in

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intentions about expressing meaning through costume. I believe that a connection exists between performers' design agency and audience response to costume, but at this point it remains a suggestion, offered in order to open an avenue for further investigation.

[8] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977). See especially chapters 5 ("Man as Actor") and 7 ("Personality in Public").

melodrama): "in the theatre, unlike the street, life was unshielded; it appeared as it was."[9] As he sees it, stage costume reflected interior character – or even truth – in a way that street fashion did not.[10]

While this one-to-one correspondence of character and appearance may be true for many plays of the period, it is somewhat complicated by the rising culture of celebrity. Especially when actors supplied their own stage garments, the symbolic value of a costume arose from a complex interaction between the stage role and the actor's off-stage persona. Actresses' costumes never entirely revealed nor entirely shielded personality ("expressive" versus "protective" in Sennett's theory), but rather negotiated the tension between the performer's persona and the role. In the mid-nineteenth century, Marietta Piccolomini's costume choices, disseminated through the mechanisms of celebrity, delineated her personal and professional lives; a generation later, Ellen Terry took this a step further by creating an off-stage persona out of whole cloth, a half-way point between her private life and the characters she portrayed. Both women's stage garments establish costume design as an important field on which to trace the shifting relationship between fictional character, acting persona, and private life; taken together, they can show us something about the changing reading of costume design across the nineteenth century.

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[9] Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man,* 176.

[10] Sennett's observation are most obviously true of popular forms such as melodrama. Late-nineteenth-century Naturalism, while it favored the idea that appearances could reveal truth, faced a conflict between costumes which conveyed interiority and adherence to photographic realism, especially in menswear (which was quite dark and inexpressive in this period). The two case studies here – both focusing on women and both non-realistic in some way (opera or historical drama) – are free to participate in the trend of expressive costumes more fully.

Marietta Piccolomini: A Contemporary *La Traviata*

Writing to the President of the Teatro La Fenice on January 30, 1853, Giuseppe Verdi described the kind of performer he wanted to play Violetta in his forthcoming *La Traviata*: "she has a beautiful figure, spirit, and is good onstage; optimal qualities for la Traviata."[11] While the premiere at La Fenice was by all accounts visually and theatrically disappointing, the character of Violetta received a substantial make-over from one of her first successful interpreters, Marietta Piccolomini, in the decade following *La Traviata's* premiere. Piccolomini's adept manipulation of the visual register, including her costume choices, shaped the character of Violetta for generations to come.

The history of the *La Traviata* costumes is contentious: many early Verdi biographies claim that the premiere of 6 March 1853 was given in modern costumes, as Verdi desired, leading to scandal and the opera's initial unpopularity. Recent scholarship, however, has definitively established that Verdi lost the costume battle with Teatro La Fenice's management well before the premiere.[12] Librettist Francesco Maria Piave had intended all along to move the action of the source text – Alexandre Dumas *fils'* contemporary play *La Dame aux Camélias*, adapted from his novel of the same name – back to the eighteenth century. After pressure from the management, Verdi reluctantly agreed, but insisted that no powdered wigs be used, so they settled on the period directly

[11] Quoted in Susan Rutherford, "*La Traviata* or the 'Willing Grisette': Male Critics and Female Performance in the 1850s," in *Verdi 2001*, eds. Fabrizio della Seta and Robert Montemarra Marvin (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2003), 591.

[12] See Julian Budden, "The Two Traviatas," *Proceeding of Royal Music Academy* 99 (1972-73): 43 n.2, and Massimo Mila, *I costumi della Traviata,* (Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1984), 170.

before wigs became fashionable, about 1700.[13] In a letter of 12 January 1853, the administration of La Fenice devoted considerable space to explaining why contemporary dress would be unwise:

> …it is very important not to go against the ingrained opinions of the public, who are reluctant to see on the stage of La Fenice costumes without frills and lacking that splendor which is certainly wrongfully equated with the richness of the spectacle…
>
> On the other hand, the maestro will find it no small hurdle making the extras advantageously wear modern dress. The shoemaker, the printer, the fisherman, and the empty-headed women from whose ranks the choruses are formed, disappear in the costumes of past centuries, but dressed in today's tail coats they always remain caricatures [replacing 'scoundrels'] embarrassed to be pretending they belong to good society.
>
> …It is also necessary to have the consent of the Podestà and of the Imperial Police Administration, who approved the libretto as presented, that is, with the action set in the time of Richelieu.[14]

To the three arguments the management stated here (that the audience expected period dress, that the chorus would be unconvincing in modern costumes, and that it might cause problems with the censor), Mercedes Viale Ferrero adds another possible reason for the older costumes: *opera seria* was usually a period affair, while comic opera was often played in modern dress. A modern setting for *La Traviata,* especially for those audience members unfamiliar with the source text (Dumas *fils'* play had yet to be published in Italian), might have suggested that it was a comedy.[15]

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[13] Fabrizio Della Seta, introduction to *La Traviata: melodramma in tre atti,* by Giuseppe Verdi, libretto by Francesco Maria Piave (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Milano: Ricordi, 1997), xv.

[14] Quoted and translated in Della Seta, introduction, xv. Letter written by secretary Guglielmo Brenna on behalf of the directors.

[15] Mercedes Viale Ferrero, "Staging a Tragedy of the Day," in *Violetta and Her Sisters*, ed. Nicholas John (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 245.

Massimo Mila notes that the opera was very popular the following year at the San Benedetto with the same costumes (slightly retouched),[16] ultimately arguing that the costumes and *mise-en-scène* had little to do with the popularity of the opera.[17] It does seem, however, that the opera's later success had quite a bit to do with the credibility of the portrayal of Violetta (which could have been greatly influenced by costume): the success of the 1854 San Benedetto revival was attributed by both Piave and the press to the convincing visual portrayal of the new Violetta, Maria Spezia.[18] Verdi wrote shortly before the revival that "everything depends, I think, on the prima donna."[19] Perhaps sharing his concern, Piave reported to their publisher Ricordi that Spezia would do well, since "her very pallor, her very exhaustion, her entire person and physiognomy all concur to render her the true incarnation of the idea of Dumas, Verdi, and me."[20] While successful, Maria Spezia had little lasting impact on *La Traviata*: she moved to Spain immediately after the San Benedetto performances, and rarely sang Violetta again. She was succeeded in visually-driven representations of Violetta by Marietta Piccolomini;

[16] Mila, *I costumi della Traviata,* 172. This quote is attributed to a letter from Ricordi to Verdi, without citation. It is very difficult to know what "ritoccato" meant in practical terms; possibilities include everything from the original garments, altered for fit, to entirely new ones of the same period or style created to suit the new singers.

[17] Mila, *I costumi della Traviata,* 172.

[18] Della Seta, introduction, xxv-xxvii. As Della Seta notes, this may have been a somewhat disingenuous posture, since Verdi was trying to keep quiet the fact that he had made significant revisions to several key musical numbers between the premiere and the San Benedetto revival. Still, it seems revealing that Spezia's appearance was the focus of staff and media attention.

[19] Letter to Vigna, 23 March 1854, quoted in Della Seta, introduction, xxv.

[20] Letter of 5 May 1854, quoted in Della Seta, introduction, xxvi.

Piccolomini's unusual choice of contemporary dress in this role was a key factor in creating her much-praised realistic[21] portrayal of Verdi's heroine.

Born to a noble family of Siena, Marietta Piccolomini (1834-1899; first name sometimes given as Maria) began performing in private recitals and charity concerts as a child. Her aristocratic and pious family (boasting two Popes in their ancestry) did not want her to pursue a professional career, but finally relented and allowed her to make her debut in 1852.[22] Her aristocratic origins excited breathless interest in the press: as a journal of the period put it, "so many ancestors, so many obstacles to a theatrical calling; but true genius triumphs over everything which shackles it… [at her debut] the public applauded, and they were bound to applaud to excess, if only for the remarkable nature of the occurrence… but it was at Turin in 1855 that her renown made a sudden explosion after her appearance in *La Traviata*."[23] She first sang Violetta in Turin and then in Sienna during 1855, and shortly thereafter embarked on a tour of the opera to London,

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[21] While it is too early to speak of the specific theatrical movement later called Realism (an offshoot of Naturalism), I am thinking here of a more general nineteenth-century meaning of the word; as Raymond Williams puts it, "It was used in French from the 1830s and in English from the 1850s… as a term to describe a method or an attitude in art and literature – at first an exceptional accuracy of representation, later a commitment to describing real events and showing things as they actually exist" in *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1985), 258-259. It is this "exceptional accuracy of representation" that many of Piccolomini's reviews identify.

[22] For further biographical information on Piccolomini, see her nephew's biography a few years after her death: Pietro Piccolomini Clementini, *Marietta Piccolomini Marchesa Caetani della Fargna. Cenni Biografici* (Siena: Tipografia Editrice S. Bernardino, 1900), reprinted in *L'unione corale senese a Marietta Piccolomini, soprano* (Siena: Nuova immagine editrice, 1999); and the chapter on Piccolomini in Ellen Creathorne Clayton, *Queens of Song: being memoirs of some of the most celebrated female vocalists who have appeared on the lyric stage, from the earliest days of opera to the present time*, (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1863).

[23] Quoted in Arthur Pougin. *Verdi: An Anecdotic History of His Life and Works*, trans. James E. Matthew (New York: Scribner and Welford. 1887), 156. Exact citation of the journal not given.

Dublin, Paris, and New York (1856-1859). While she occasionally sang other roles, she became strongly identified with Violetta for the rest of her career.

The surviving illustrations and first-hand accounts of Piccolomini's performances as Violetta reveal a surprising fact: she wore contemporary clothing, possibly drawn from her own offstage wardrobe, while the rest of the cast remained in seventeenth-century dress. Viale Ferrero provides a detailed analysis of Piccolomini's appearance based on press illustrations:

> The Parisian illustrations of 1857 or those from Siena and Turin in the previous year show that the prima donna, Maria Piccolomini, wore dresses that were contemporary, or almost. The only difference between Siena and Turin was an elaborate overgown, reminiscent of the previous century but back in fashion under the Second Empire… Maria slightly reduced the size of the lace *volant*[24] which in Turin covered her arm down to the elbow: in Siena it fluttered around her *décolleté* while in Paris it could scarcely be glimpsed in the centre of her corsage. In London the *volant* had disappeared altogether and her costume was a contemporary ballgown. It looks as though Maria Piccolomini had her own costume, which suited her (very elegant) figure, and that she varied it with accessories.[25]

[24] In the nineteenth century this term was used to refer to several types of flounces and frills. Lace frills at the elbows and filling in a décolletage were characteristics of eighteenth-century costume, so Viale Ferrero's point here is that Piccolomini stripped away vestiges of period dress at different places on the tour.

[25] Viale Ferrero, "Staging a Tragedy of the Day," 246. While she implies that Piccolomini had one consistent gown with different accessories, it is also highly possible that she wore a series of different dresses, all from her personal wardrobe. That Piccolomini wore the most up-to-date costume in London may reflect the way that censorship functioned there: nineteenth-century London theatre censors focused mostly on texts and rarely attended performances, making censorship of potentially subversive scenic elements difficult. See Roberta Montemorra Marvin, "Censorship of Verdi's Operas in Victorian London," *Music & Letters*, 82.4 (Nov., 2001): 588; and Tracy Davis, *Actresses as working women,* 118.

Fig. 9: Act II, scene ii, as performed in London, from the Illustrated London News, 31 May 1856.

Across five countries and two continents, the reviews of Piccolomini as Violetta share many characteristics. She was praised mostly for her acting, youth, and beauty, rather than her vocal ability; many reviewers despaired of explaining her overwhelming popularity, falling back on phrases like "je ne sais quoi" or "charm". Her Violetta was perceived as "daringly realistic,"[26] – while many reviewers commented on her believability in the role, opinion was sharply divided over whether this was a good thing, with some critics feeling that her portrayal of the prostitute was too life-like and in poor taste. For contemporary reviewers, Piccolomini's costumes would have contributed to this realistic effect onstage; especially for those familiar with Dumas *fils'* work, her

[26] Rutherford, Susan, "*La Traviata* or the 'Willing Grisette,'" 592; this phrase is her summary of the London reviewer's attitudes.

modern dress would have recalled the immediacy of the source text, and could perhaps even be construed as a direct reference to the real-life woman who inspired the author (Dumas *fils'* play was a thinly veiled account of the life of Parisian courtesan Marie Duplessis, who had died in 1847).[27]

The London reviews make no direct references to her modern clothing, but call attention to Piccolomini's arresting visual presence: the *Times* wrote than at the end of Act II, "she did not utter a note, but nevertheless, she monopolized to herself all the attention of the public, who contemplating that mute figure forgot the insipid air by which her movements were accompanied."[28] *Reynolds' Newspaper* reported that Piccolomini "made an instant impression by her engaging aspect before she opened her lips."[29] The Paris critics were more forthcoming: several Paris reviews, displeased with the eighteenth-century production, note the discrepancy of Piccolomini's contemporary dress. *Le Constitutionnel* wrote sarcastically that "as a kind of piquant anachronism, the men have doublets, felt hats and rapiers, while the heroine is dressed *a la mode* for the year 1856,"[30] and the *Gazette du France* added that her costumes "are all tailored yesterday by the [fashionable] ateliers of Victorine and de Palmyre."[31] *Le Siècle* approved

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[27] Alexandre Dumas *fils* first wrote a novel called *La Dame aux Camélias*, published the same year as Marie Duplessis death (1947) and strongly associated with her; he adapted his work into a play in 1852.

[28] "Her Majesty's Theatre," *The Times*, (London) 26 May 1856.

[29] "The Drama, Music, Etc.," *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London) 1 June 1856.

[30] *Le Constitutionnel,* 8 December 1856. Reprinted in *La réception de Verdi en France: Anthologie de la presse 1845-1894*, ed. Hervé Gartioux (Weinsberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2001), 217.

[31] *La Gazette de France*, 16 December 1856. Reprinted in *La réception de Verdi en France: Anthologie de la presse 1845-1894*, ed. Hervé Gartioux (Weinsberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2001), 236. While this review says that "the women of Traviata" have these up-to-date

of this choice, arguing that modern dress was required by the character: "the artist charged with the role of Violetta has need of a contemporary look."[32] The association between Piccolomini and French fashion was apparent even to American eyes, where the *New York Daily Tribute* concluded a review of her *Traviata* performance with: "her dressing, may we add, was excellent – in the best of French taste."[33]

While Italian reviews do not focus on her costumes, they do say quite a bit about her charisma, appearance, and dramatic abilities; they emphasize her ability to move the audience. A Turin review called her portrayal "sublime… her singing is full of affect; she has tears in her voice, harmony in her eyes."[34] The Florence *Indicatore* noted that "she understands the third act as a real Ristori dramatic part, and the line 'Tell him that I want to live again' [just before Violetta dies] is so strong that the whole audience cannot curb their tears and frantic screams."[35] This comparison to contemporary tragic actress Adelaide Ristori, present in several Italian reviews, may also indicate something about Piccolomini's costumes: Bignami argues that Ristori was one of the first Italian performers to use costumes that were period- and character-specific, and which fit in with

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costumes, implying that Piccolomini was not the only one in modern dress, it is the only review to mention that, perhaps because there are no female leads besides Violetta in the piece (the other solo singing roles for women are Flora, another courtesan present peripherally in two scenes, and Annina, Violetta's maid). From extant images, it is clear that at least some of the time, the secondary female characters did wear historical costumes.

[32] *Le Siecle*, 9 December 1856. Reprinted in *La réception de Verdi en France: Anthologie de la presse 1845-1894*, ed. Hervé Gartioux (Weinsberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2001), 214. Piccolomini seems to have agreed with the reviewer that contemporary apparel was necessary for Violetta in particular – extant images of her in other roles do not show contemporary dress.

[33] "Academy of Music – M'lle Piccolomini," *The New York Daily Tribune*, 21 Oct 1858.

[34] The journal *Il Trovatore* (Torino) 10 October 1855, quoted in Pietro Piccolomini Clementini, *Marietta Piccolomini,* 29.

[35] 23 Feb 1856, quoted in Pietro Piccolomini Clementini, *Marietta Piccolomini,* 38.

the overall dramatic interpretation.[36] Italian reviewers, consciously or subconsciously, may have recognized a similarity in Piccolomini's methods for creating a character through costume. Italian criticism also reiterates the connection between Piccolomini and this particular role – "with one voice [she is] recognized as unsurpassed in this part"[37] – and the perceived collapse of her on- and off-stage personae – "she laughs and cries not as one does on stage, but as it happens in every-day life."[38]

Some thought this portrayal went too far: as a London critic remembered some years later, "Never did any young lady, whose private claims to modest respect were so great as hers are known to be – with such self-denial, fling off their protection, in her resolution to lay hold of her public, at all risks. – Her performances at times approached offence against maidenly reticence and delicacy."[39] A Paris review praised her interpretation, implicitly referencing her contemporary costume: "in spite of the strange ideas of the author [i.e., moving the action to 1700], she plays the first act, not as a woman of the seventeenth century, but a *lorette*[40] of our day, as common sense dictates" but cautioned that, "she is a little over the top in her 'effects.' There are difference

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[36] Bignami, 151-152.

[37] *La Fama* (Milano) 19 Nov 1855, quoted in Pietro Piccolomini Clementini, *Marietta Piccolomini,* 31.

[38] *Il Dritto* (Torino) reprinted in *L'Arte* (Firenze) 31 Oct 1855, quoted in Pietro Piccolomini Clementini, 31.

[39] H. Chorley, *Thirty Years Musical Recollections.* Quoted by Rutherford in "*La Traviata* or the 'Willing Grisette,'" 593.

[40] Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the term "lorette" designated a middle-class prostitute, with a status somewhere between a street walker and a celebrity courtesan, so-called because at one time they could be found near the church of Notre Dame de Lorette in Paris. Lorettes were often steady mistresses kept by bourgeois men – in *La Traviata*, Violetta begins in the category of high-class courtesan, with aristocratic lovers, and then perhaps becomes more like a lorette during her relationship with the bourgeois Alfredo. The word quickly made its way into English – the *Oxford English Dictionary* records a first print use in 1865.

nuances in this category of the dissipated world. The *lorette* of M. Dumas *fils* is not a habitué of the Bal Mabille [i.e., a lower-class prostitute], but a great lady of her genre… we advise Mlle. Piccolomini to study this difference."[41] While "effects" here probably refers more to gestures or movement than to costumes, this review begins to draw together Piccolomini's contemporary appearance with her "daring realism."

Fig. 10: Milan 1855 Violetta costume sketch[42]

Fig. 11: Crowquill's drawing of Piccolomini[43]

[41] *Le Messager des Theatres et des Arts,* 7 December 1856. Reprinted in *La réception de Verdi en France: Anthologie de la presse 1845-1894*, ed. Hervé Gartioux (Weinsberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2001), 214.

[42] In the collection of the Museo Ricchieri, Pordonne. Reprinted in Mila, who believes it to be very similar to the costumes of *La Traviata*'s 1853 premiere (La Fenice's originals were unfortunately lost due to fire).

[43] This is a detail from the third plate in a bound collection of hand-colored etchings by Alfred Crowquill entitled *Opera, Impressioni della Piccolomini, La Traviata* (London: J. King, undated) in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum. http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O186799/h-beard-print-collection-print-crowquill-alfred/

Comparing a extant sketch for Violetta's costume from the 1855 Milan production (believed to have closely followed the 1853 premiere at La Fenice) with an illustration of Piccolomini in London by Alfred Crowquill, we can see Piccolomini's costume shows some similarity to the original, with small but significant differences. The 1855 sketch appears to show Violetta in riding costume (she carries a crop), and is presumably for Act II scene i, the "country life" segment when Violetta and Alfredo are living together outside of Paris; the Crowquill illustration of Piccolomini is captioned with a quote from the libretto, which places it in this same scene. Both dresses consist of a blue overdress, a virtuous color associated with the Madonna, with a white underskirt. Probably the largest difference is in the neckline and sleeves – Piccolomini's costume has an off-the-shoulder decollete and short sleeves with a small frill, a significant change from the original, which is buttoned up to the neck and features typically-eighteenth-century three-quarter sleeves with a deep cuff and wide lace trim. Because of the neckline, Piccolomini's costume appears to be evening dress, rather than the daytime or traveling dress of the 1855 sketch; she may have chosen an evening gown because she also wore this costume in the following scene, when Violetta goes to Paris for a party (the same costume is shown in Crowquill's illustration of that scene). Piccolomini's overskirt falls straight to the floor, whereas the 1855 costume appears looped up in a swagged style more associated with the previous century.[44] Piccolomini's hair is dressed in a smooth, low nineteenth-century style, without the eighteenth-century feathered hat present in the

[44] Ferrero writes that this "elaborate overgown [was] reminiscent of the previous century but back in fashion under the Second Empire" (246). While the tiered skirt is more typical of the period, I have found a number of split overskirts like this in French fashion mags of the 1850s, such as *Le Petit Courrier des Dames* and *La Mode Illustrée.* Empress Eugenie wears one in at least two portraits before 1860. Thus, Piccolomini's use of it connects her to French high fasion, as well as harkening back to eighteenth-century style.

1855 costume (this difference also indicates inside versus outside attire). The earlier costume features no jewelry at all, but Piccolomini wears a bracelet and a hair ornament of some kind. In changing this costume from an outdoor day dress to an indoor evening toilette (complete with jewelry), Piccolomini shifts the perspective of the spectator within the diegesis, drawing us closer to Violetta – the 1855 riding costume could have been seen by anyone on the street, whereas an evening dress would be viewed only by Violetta's acquaintances. This costume may also more clearly connote Violetta's profession: as Lynda Nead notes, prostitution was often represented in images of the period as an overly-showy appearance, with jewelry or ornaments, in the height of fashionable attire.[45]

Fig 12: detail of ILN's 1856 Traviata sketch

It is also worth noting that this costume does not match what Piccolomini is wearing in the same scene printed in the *Illustrated London News*, where she does not have an overskirt and the sleeve is slightly different. While certain features of the costume in Crowquill's illustration could be read as vestiges of the eighteenth century, the gown in the *Illustrated London News* is unmistakably contemporary. She is also portrayed next to

[45] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 168-175. See also Philippe Perrot*, Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A history of clothing in the nineteenth century,* trans. Richard Bienvenu. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), for an analysis of how cutting-edge fashions were first associated with courtesans, only later trickling down to respectable society.

another woman – probably the character Flora – who is wearing a long full sleeve with a wide cuff; especially combined with the low neckline of an evening gown, this sleeve connotes late-seventeenth-century fashions. Piccolomini's gown in Crowquill appears clearly related to the design of the premiere, in color and cut, whereas the gown shown in the newspaper sketch breaks this connection. This discrepancy may simply indicate that Piccolomini did not wear the same costume every night, not uncommon if the actress drew items from her personal wardrobe; however, it could also be an example of artistic license, either on the part of Crowquill or the artist for the paper. Roberta Montemorra Marvin, in her article on the portrayal of prima donnas in the *Illustrated London News,* argues that these images deployed codes of appearance to subtly shape readers' impressions of performing women; she finds that whereas images of English and northern european performers "bear the visual markers of moral character and good taste in dress," southern europeans were portrayed as exotic and sexualized, "on display, self consciously aloof from the reader in their physical poses."[46] The *ILN*'s sketches of Piccolomini may participate in this trend, exaggerating the costume's contemporaneity and contrasting it to other characters' more historical garments, to create an even more fashionable, scandalous, "over the top" impression.

Reception of Piccolomini's "over the top" portrayal was greatly shaped, however, by her personal background: Rutherford contends that for lower-class performers, "too realistic a representation of a courtesan was arguably simply too great a risk to a still precarious reputation for respectability… [for] Piccolomini, however… the credentials

[46] Roberta Montemorra Marvin, "Idealizing the Prima Donna in Mid-Victorian London" in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century,* ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33-34.

she needed to establish with her audience were not social but professional: to demonstrate that the dilettante singer was as fearless and inventive an actress as any of her colleagues born in the proverbial trunk."[47] Piccolomini balanced this desire to prove her professional acting skills, however, with a scrupulous preservation of propriety in private life, and made sure newspapers got the point that she was an aristocrat first. Her American impresario (Bernard Ullman of the Academy of Music), in a clever marketing stroke, wrote a preemptive letter to the editor of the *New York Daily Tribune* asking the press not to focus on her family background, while managing to slip in the fact that she was a princess (an exaggeration) and related to important Church officers: "Mlle. Piccolomini comes here as an artist, and not as a princess, which title she dropped on her first appearance in public, of her own free will, not, as it is asserted, by command of Cardinal Piccolomini."[48] According to newspaper reports and letters from the Piccolomini archive, her entire family traveled with her on tour, cutting off any speculation about her off-stage behavior and giving the tour the feeling of a family holiday.[49] She and her family were written about in American society columns[50] and received by local aristocracy in London; the only rumors that seem to have surfaced about Marietta

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[47] Rutherford, "*La Traviata* or the 'Willing Grisette,'" 596-597.

[48] "Mlle. Piccolomini and Mr. Ullman," *The New York Daily Tribune,* 9 Oct 1858.

[49] "Piccolomini or Not?" *The New York Daily Tribune*, 22 Nov 1858: "The family consists of Mademoiselle Piccolomini, her father and mother, the Count and Countess Carlo Piccolomini [Marietta's uncle and aunt], a younger sister and an only brother, a young lad of fourteen, all of whom accompany her everywhere in her travels, as she never consents to any engagement without previously making a stipulation to this effect."

[50] See for example the "Personal" column in *The New York Times*, 15 Oct 1858, which lists the family among other visiting dignitaries.

speculated about which nobleman she might marry.[51] The amazing fact about Piccolomini's career is that this seems to have worked. In 1863, she married the Marchese Gaetani della Fargia and retired, slipping back into the Italian aristocracy apparently untarnished by five years of playing a prostitute.

This press promotion of her family background gives another cast to Piccolomini's contemporary costume choices: these garments not only created an accurate portrayal of Violetta's character, but also broadcast Piccolomini's personal taste and celebrity. Rutherford reminds us that "attempts at historical accuracy were… often sacrificed to accord with off-stage stylistic modes of dress… [for example] the re-emergence of the hoop skirt in mid-nineteenth century fashion led to its use once again in theatrical costume, regardless of the fictional period being presented," such as Adelina Patti "wearing a hoop skirt beneath her nightdress" in *La Sonnambula*.[52] In this light, Piccolomini's modern costumes also functioned in an anti-realistic, meta-theatrical way: to remind viewers that Piccolomini was really an aristocrat and a major star, with clothing to match. The character of Violetta is a particularly good vehicle for this gesture of meta-theatricality or visual self-awareness, since she has two key moments of literal self-reflection, in which looking at herself in a mirror helps her to realize her situation;

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[51] Apparently she was pursued in England by a Lord Ward, which got enough press in London to merit teasing in her personal letters with Giuseppina Verdi (the composer's wife), who wrote "Tell me when you will marry *Lord Ward* so I'll know to whom and how to address my letters. I laughed so much reading this *canard*, which is surely one of many journalistic truths." Quoted in Francesco and Giorgio Piccolomini, *Giuseppe Verdi e Marietta Piccolomini: ricordanze di amicizia* (Siena, 1913) – reprinted in *L'unione corale senese a Marietta Piccolomini, soprano* (Siena: Nuova immagine editrice, 1999). See also newspaper accounts of Lord Ward's attention to her, for example "Dispatch from London," *The New York Times,* 14 Oct 1858: "Lord Ward handed to her from the proscenium box on the pit-tier, a matchless white rose, stripped of leaves and thorns" – a gesture that reworks Violetta's traditional adornment of white or red camellias.

[52] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 241-242.

the gesture of self-reflection, literal and metaphorical, is thematically important to the opera as a whole.[53]

A London review reflects the extent to which the cult of Piccolomini overtook the opera: "Mlle. Piccolomini is the beginning, middle, and end of the opera, and it is *her* Traviata that the public goes to see. *Her* Traviata conquers the libretto itself, and to a wonderful degree succeeds also in conquering the music, and impressing its own stamp on very much of it."[54] When *La Traviata* was finally licensed in France, cut and translated into French, it was performed under the title *Violetta*, perhaps attesting to the lasting impact of Piccolomini's performance in the 1856 Paris tour.[55] Many reviews suggest that Piccolomini's performances conveyed her authority and status, in the form of "taste" and "genius." As another London review put it, "Mdlle. Piccolomini with a most perfect instinct never attempts a note or tone beyond her skill, and uses a voice of no great natural power, and too thin to be remarkable for melody, with a most exquisite and unerring taste." Although he compares her singing and appearance unfavorably to rival *prima donna* Johanna Wagner, this reviewer concludes that "Mdlle. Piccolomini appeals straight, with the power of rare genius, to something that lies deeper than eyes and ears."[56] For this spectator, both the visual and vocal aspects of her performance function

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[53] Violetta looks in the mirror at "Oh qual pallor…" near the beginning of Act I, the first indication that she is sick, and "Oh, come son mutata!" just before her aria in Act III, as she notes the great changes in appearance her illness has caused. Arthur Groos argues that all of her important Act III aria, "Addio del passato," is an extension of this self-reflection: Arthur Groos, "TB Sheets': Love and Disease in 'La Traviata,'" in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7.3 (Nov., 1995): 252.

[54] "The Theatrical Examiner: Her Majesty's Theatre," *The Examiner* (London), 31 May 1856; my emphasis.

[55] Della Seta, introduction, xxviii.

as tools to communicate "something that lies deeper."

This is exactly the kind of symbolic understanding of appearance that Sennett sees emerging in the nineteenth century, but what it reveals here is difficult to determine – the "deeper" meaning may be something about the character of Violetta, about Piccolomini herself, or something that lies within the viewer. This review may signal the beginnings of a new understanding of costume as an acting tool: some audience members perceive her onstage clothing to say something about her conception of Violetta, rather than about her conception of herself. This is hard to separate, however; especially because *La Traviata* foregrounds female self-observation as a means to metaphoric self-reflection within the diegesis, Piccolomini's costumes could easily engage *both* the emerging trends of realism (revealing something about Violetta) and celebrity culture (revealing something about Piccolomini).

Piccolomini's Violetta both holds together and teases apart the notions of "authenticity" and "realism." In one sense, the realism of her portrayal is made possible precisely by its inauthenticity – she can act the whore in an uninhibited way only because her virtue is so firmly established by her family background and conduct offstage. This paradox is carried out partly through the use of fashionable and possibly personal garments onstage, which function both as a part of Piccolomini's interpretation of Violetta, and also as a reminder of the singer's personal privilege and status. While in one way these modern costumes are part of her interpretation of Violetta, this interpretation is only available to her because she is authentically aristocratic; remembering the objections of La Fenice's directors to lower-class performers in

[56] "The Theatrical Examiner: Her Majesty's Theatre," *The Examiner* (London), 21 June 1856.

costume (they "disappear in the costumes of past centuries, but dressed in today's tail coats they always remain caricatures embarrassed to be pretending they belong to good society"[57]), it is clear that Piccolomini's personal status greatly affected reception of her costumes.

Whatever her interpretive intentions, Piccolomini began a tradition of *prime donne* providing their own fashionable, up-to-the-minute costumes when singing Violetta, which reflected the singers' interpretations of the role as well as their personal taste and status.[58] This performance tradition was widespread into the early twentieth century, resulting in some very odd-looking productions: the rest of the characters remained in the dress of 1700 until around the turn of the century, and even after productions were modernized to 1853, the *prima donna* was frequently seen wearing clothing from thirty, forty, even fifty years later than everyone else.[59] Visually and otherwise, Piccolomini's work did much to cement Violetta as a star turn for a singing-actress. In her Violetta, the three female types identified by Abigail Solomon-Godeau as the nexus of fetishistic celebrity converge: "the prostitute, who unites in her person both seller and commodity; in the dancer or actress – the spectacle within the spectacle – who is perceived as a type of circulating goods; and in the notion of the beautiful, worldly woman."[60] Through Piccolomini's interpretation, the character of Violetta absorbed these

[57] Letter of 12 January 1853, quoted above.

[58] After Piccolomini, many nineteenth-century prima donnas wore contemporary fashionable clothing in this role. For a handful of examples, see Christine Nilsson in the 1860s, Adelina Patti in the 1870s, Lillian Nordica in the 1880s, Marcella Sembrich in the 1890s, Nellie Melba c. 1900, and Geraldine Farrar in 1901. The trend even extended to some divas of the early twentieth century, such as Rosa Ponselle at the Metropolitan Opera in 1935.

[59] William Weaver, *Verdi: A Documentary Study* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 129.

three aspects, becoming an opportunity for a female performer to showcase her sexuality, her performative powers (including but not limited to vocal abilities), and her taste and personality as a privileged, educated woman.

Ellen Terry, Alice Comyns Carr, and the "Beetle Dress"

The English actress Ellen Terry (1847-1928) was born into exactly the kind of "proverbial trunk"[61] that Marietta Piccolomini lacked: her parents, Ben and Sarah Terry, were both career actors, and six of their nine children followed them onto the stage. Ellen famously made her debut as Mamillius in Charles Kean's 1856 production of *The Winter's Tale*, around the age of eight; in later years, her memory of the occasion focused on the costume she wore: "There is something, I suppose, in a woman's nature which always makes her remember how she was dressed at any specially eventful moment of her life, and I can see myself, as though it were yesterday, in the little red-and-silver dress I wore… my hair in sausage curls on each side of my head."[62] Terry continued to excel in Shakespearean roles throughout her career, building an onstage persona as an old-fashioned "womanly woman" devoted to traditional family values. Her personal life, however, was quite unconventional. She made three marriages, the first at sixteen to the 47-year-old painter G.F. Watts, which was annulled after less than a year; even more scandalously, she had two children out of wedlock, with E. W. Godwin, whom she never married (their children, Edward Gordon and Edith, took the invented surname "Craig"). Her twenty-year professional partnership with Henry Irving very likely had a romantic

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[60] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," in *October* 39 (Winter, 1986): 68.

[61] Rutherford, "*La Traviata* or the 'Willing Grisette,'" quoted above.

[62] Ellen Terry, *Story of my Life* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1908), 14.

component as well, as was often assumed or speculated about during the "Lyceum years."[63] Although Terry glosses her sharp sartorial memories as "woman's nature" in her autobiography, it is clear that she used clothing as an important tool in fashioning her on- and off-stage images, and in successfully managing the discrepancies between them without scandal.[64]

Terry nurtured a strong connection to fine art and particularly to the Aesthetic movement throughout her life; after her marriage to G.F. Watts, her social circle included artists such as John Everett Millais, Holman Hunt, James Abbott Whistler, Julia Cameron Mitchell, Edmond Burne-Jones, and literary figures including George Bernard Shaw, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Oscar Wilde, and J.M. Barrie. Contemporary painter and friend W. Graham Robertson famously described her as "*par excellence* the Painter's actress, [she] appealed to the eye before the ear;" a sobriquet that defined her 60-year career.[65] Michael Booth argues that the newly-fashionable "pictorial dramaturgy," especially its

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[63] According to Margaret Webster (whose parents were both in Irving's Lyceum company), quoted in David Cheshire, *Portrait of Ellen Terry* (Oxford: Amber Lane, 1989), 87.

[64] There is a wealth of biographical information on Terry. I have relied primarily on her autobiography (*Story of my Life,* 1908) and three important biographies: Roger Manvell, *Ellen Terry* (London: Heinemann, 1968); Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry, Player in her Time* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1987); and David Cheshire, *Portrait of Ellen Terry* (Oxford: Amber Lane, 1989). There is also a reissue of Terry's autobiography with interesting additional material by her daughter Edith Craig and Cristopher St. John (aka Christabel Marshall), under the title *Ellen Terry's Memoirs* (London: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1932). Edith Craig also pursued a career in theatre, working (after 1895) as a costume designer and (after 1911) as a director/producer of the suffragette theatre society "Pioneer Players." While outside the scope of this study, there may be interesting correlations or genealogies to be drawn between Terry's and Edith's work with costume and issues of female visuality.

[65] W. Graham Robertson, *Time Was* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1931), 54. While Graham Robertson intended this as a compliment, it was used as a critique of the actress as well: critic William Archer wrote belittlingly, "Whatever her [Terry's] absolute merits in a part, she always harmonizes as perhaps she alone could with the whole tone of the picture. She gives their crowning charm to the fabrics of South Kensington" in *Henry Irving, actor and manager* (London: Field & Tuer [1883]), 101.

application to acting as opposed to the larger stage picture, was associated with Ellen Terry on an unprecedented level: "no performer in the history of the English stage had ever before been considered in quite these pictorial terms."[66] One reason for this may be that Terry cultivated a style of artistic clothing offstage as well; she was often reported to wear Aesthetic dress.[67] Henry James, writing for the *Nation* in July 1879, remarked that "She is greatly the fashion at present, and she belongs properly to a period which takes a strong interest in aesthetic furniture, archaeological attire, and blue china. Miss Ellen Terry is 'aesthetic': not only her garments but her features themselves bear a stamp of the new enthusiasm."[68] Valerie Cumming notes that Terry's personal clothes looked very like her costumes, claiming that "this cross-referencing between private person and public performer was one of the aspects of her that intrigued her English audiences and fascinated Americans" during tours in the 1880s-90s.[69] Onstage and off, Terry seems to have offered herself publicly as a visual spectacle.

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[66] Booth, "Pictorial Acting and Ellen Terry" in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, ed. Richard Foulkes, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 86. Booth draws the term "pictorial dramaturgy" from Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

[67] In *Portrait of Ellen Terry*, Cheshire writes that offstage, "She rarely wore make-up, and as she eschewed corsets and tight-fitting clothes almost completely after 1870 her figure was almost always unfashionably mature" (12). Terry and others report that she married Watts in a gown designed by Pre-Raphaelite artist Holman Hunt. "Artistic" or later "Aesthetic dress" was a movement in the 1860s-90s towards rich fabrics and simplicity of design, often evoking orientalist or medieval garments, against the heavily corseted and bustled women's fashion and drab, uniform men's clothing of the time. Although sometimes associated with Dress Reform, a wing of the suffragist movement promoting healthier and sportier garments for women, Aesthetic dress was an outgrowth of Aesthetic philosophy rather than politics.

[68] Quoted in Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, 124.

[69] Valerie Cumming, "Ellen Terry: An Aesthetic Actress and her Costumes," *Costume* 21 (1987), 69-70.

Terry saw herself as an initiate in artistic matters, claiming later that this expertise was one of the elements she contributed to her partnership with Henry Irving: upon joining the Lyceum company, "I brought help too, in pictorial matters. Henry Irving had had little training in such matters – I had had a great deal. Judgment about colours, clothes, and lighting must be *trained*. I had learned from Mr. Watts, from Mr. Godwin, and from other artists, until a sense of decorative effect had become second nature to me."[70] There is some evidence that she controlled or influenced costume choices for other cast members and perhaps even for Lyceum productions in which she did not appear,[71] although the deciding vote always belonged to Irving. In her memoirs, Terry glosses the tension between the two of them as a distinction between aesthetic effect and theatrical fitness: a clash with Irving over her costume choices for Ophelia "led me to see that, although I knew more of art and archeology in dress than he did, he had a finer sense of what was right for the *scene*."[72]

There are a number of painted portraits of Ellen Terry, often in costume or otherwise in character;[73] additionally, her costumes sometimes appear in paintings even when she does not. Although Terry is not the model, art historian Lucy Oakley has

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[70] Terry, *Story of My Life*, 150.

[71] Cumming notes the voluminous correspondence between Terry and dressmaker Mrs. Nettlesmith – several letters reference costumes that were not for Terry herself (Cumming, "Ellen Terry: An Aesthetic Actress and her Costumes," 71).

[72] Terry, *Story of My Life*, 157. Her italics. According to her, Terry discovered that red was the mourning color of eleventh-century Danes, and decided Ophelia's final dress should be this color. Irving first sent the set designer to reason with her on the grounds that this color would clash with the backdrop, so she changed the dress to black. Irving then intervened himself, suggesting that Hamlet should be the only figure in black in the play, and steered Terry back to the traditional choice of white for Ophelia.

[73] There are of course a large number by G.F.Watts, often featuring Terry as an allegorical figure, as in his *Watchman*; W. Graham Robertson's portrait, several sketches by Edmond Burne-Jones., and most importantly, John Singer-Sargent's "Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth."

identified the garment in Millais' painting "Portia" as Terry's costume from her portrayal of the role, which she lent to the artist. Oakley notes that "Ellen Terry's legal robes…evoked a connection in the nineteenth-century viewer's mind between Millais' picture and the popular actress in one of her best-known roles,"[74] a connection that may have worked all too well, since Millais' painting received the same type of criticism that Terry's acting did – that this softly pretty Portia was not masculine enough to be plausible in her cross-dressed disguise as the "young doctor."[75] If eighteenth-century actresses participated in a current of celebrity which "circulated via clothing and costume from stage to court and back again,"[76] Terry widened this circuit: her costumes circulated from stage to visual artists to the public (via reproductions). This expanded the notion of celebrity in two key ways from the eighteenth-century model: it included a vast section of the working- and middle-class,[77] and it made use of fine art as a medium. By transfusing costume images via visual art (the original paintings viewed by the elite and reproductions of them available to the masses), costumes began to acquire the status of art objects themselves.

Cumming claims that "Ellen Terry helped to make aestheticism fashionable by transforming it into an acceptable theatrical spectacle."[78] There is also a way in which

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[74] Lucy Oakley, "The Evolution of Sir John Everett Millais's 'Portia,'" in *The Metropolitan Museum Journal* 16 (1981): 185.

[75] Oakley, "The Evolution of Sir John Everett Millais's 'Portia,'" 193.

[76] Martha Nussbaum, "Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1700-1800," quoted above.

[77] Penny Farfan writes about how picture postcards – like other mass reproduced images of actors in costume – democratized access to images of elite performers even for those who did not see the play, in "'The Picture Postcard is a sign of the times': Theatre Postcards and Modernism" in *Theatre History Studies* 32 (2012): 93-119.

this relationship can be viewed in reverse, however, as making Terry herself acceptable. Adopting the (more or less) fashionable unconventionalism of the Aesthetic or Pre-Raphaelite movements may have shielded Terry from harsher constructions of her offstage behavior as simply immoral. Her association with this kind of painting may have legitimated or glossed over – by aestheticizing – her sexuality. Booth argues that her "sexuality was made acceptable and to an extent distanced by the conventions of poetic imagery and pictorial art" and that "she was simultaneously seductress and innocent… such twinning is familiar in Pre-Raphaelite art."[79] Philip Hook identifies a similar trend in French painting of the period, where classical subject matter lent "the veneer of propriety" to representations of otherwise objectionable female sexuality[80]; Rosemary Barrow argues that this associational artistic white-washing also happened in the selection of subjects for the popular performance genre of *tableaux vivants*, in which "mythological or mythologizing subjects were chosen, because they included representation of the female nude, whose classical and high-art associations…lent respectability to what was essentially an eroticized music-hall act."[81] In fostering an association between visual art and both her on- and offstage personae, Terry skillfully manipulated perceptions of her personal life, but also gave a new dimension to costume design.

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[78] Cumming, "Ellen Terry: An Aesthetic Actress and her Costumes," 73.

[79] Booth, "Pictorial Acting and Ellen Terry," 83-84.

[80] Philip Hook, "The Fallen Woman in French Nineteenth-Century Painting" in *Violetta and Her Sisters*, ed. Nicholas John. (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 173.

[81] Rosemary Barrow, "Toga Plays and Tableaux Vivants: Theatre and Painting on London's Late-Victorian and Edwardian Stage," in *Theatre Journal* 62:2 (May 2010): 220.

Nineteenth-century fine art participated in the fashionable theories of phrenology and physiognomy, the "sciences" of discerning inner characteristics from the outward appearance of, respectively, the shape of the head or the facial features. In her study of nineteenth-century English artistic representations of female sexuality, Lynda Nead argues that "this principle [reading inner characteristics from outer appearances] also extended to analysis of clothing,"[82] a claim borne out by Sennett's observations of the shifting symbolism of clothing in the period. A nineteenth-century biographer of Holman Hunt noted a changing reading of painting as a whole, driven by the influx of bourgeois patronage of fine art: instead of decadent aristocrats only interested in aesthetic pleasure, the middle class "inquired the sterling *meaning* of a picture before they bought one,"[83] leading to more narrative or symbolic paintings. By making her costumes "Art," Terry invited audiences to view stage garments in this way also: for "meaning" or clues to the inner personality of the character.

By far the most iconic of Terry's portraits and her costumes is the "beetle dress" she wore as Lady Macbeth in Henry Irving's 1888 Lyceum production, in which she was painted the following year by John Singer Sargent.[84] This gown was designed, or perhaps co-designed, for Terry by her long-time costume collaborator, Alice Comyns Carr. Alice was the wife of Joe Comyns Carr, a playwright and sometime-manager of the Grosvenor

[82] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality,* 171.

[83] F.G. Stephens, *William Holman Hunt and His Works, A Memoir of the Artist's Life, with Description of his Pictures*, published 1860. Quoted in Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 167.

[84] The beetle dress is still extant and has been recently restored by the U.K National Trust. See: http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wra-1356308883476/view-page/item473836/

Gallery, an important venue for Pre-Raphaelite painters.[85] She had no formal training as a designer or dress-maker, but like many Victorian women she had been making her own clothes since childhood. Comyns Carr began dabbling in stage design after her marriage; she began designing for Ellen Terry in 1887, after creating her sister Marion Terry's costumes for a production of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (adapted by Joe Comyns Carr), which Ellen admired.[86] Alice Comyns Carr apparently had a simpler aesthetic, probably influenced by trends in contemporary art, which Terry preferred over the elaborate and pretentious" gown "designed and/or made for her previously by Patience Harris, sister of the manager of Drury Lane.[87] Comyns Carr also had creative and flexible ideas about achieving just the right material or look: to create the dress for *The Amber Heart* (1887), which convinced Terry to work exclusively with her, the designer "twisted it up into a ball and boiled it in a potato steamer."[88] After Terry asked her to design all of her stage apparel, Comyns Carr began a career-long association with Mrs. Nettlesmith, whom she described as "the wife of the well-known animal painter, an old friend of mine, and an extremely clever dressmaker"[89] – even this lowest member of the design team had an association with fine art, which, as it is presented in this account, trumped both her personal relationship with Comyns Carr and her professional skill.

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[85] Cumming, "Ellen Terry: An Aesthetic Actress and her Costumes," 69.

[86] Alice Comyns Carr, *Reminiscences*, ed. Eve Adam (London: Hutchinson and Co. [1926]), 79.
[87] Comyns Carr says that Harris was "entirely responsible" for Terry's costumes before 1887 (79); I take this to mean that Terry and Harris came up with a design together that Harris then executed or had executed. It is difficult to know exactly what is meant by "design" in this period - often the overall concept for the garment seems to have been Terry's, with small details of the pattern or material chosen by someone else and then executed by a third person.

[88] Comyns Carr, *Reminiscences*, 80

[89] Comyns Carr, *Reminiscences*, 80.

Fig. 13: *John Singer Sargent, "Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth," 1889*

The Lady Macbeth gown painted by Sargent was the costume for her first appearance. Comyns Carr describes what she wanted:

> I was anxious to make this particular dress look as much like soft chain armour as I could, and yet have something that could give the appearance of the scales of a serpent. Suddenly I had an inspiration. I had just crocheted a little shawl in soft woollen tinsel for my mother, and, seeing it hanging on the back of a chair, I said to myself, 'that's how I'll get my effect.'
>
> "Mrs. Nettlesmith bought the fine yarn for me in Bohemia – a twist of soft green silk and blue tinsel. I then cut out the patterns from the diagrams in the wonderful costume book of Viollet le Duc, and the yarn was crocheted to match them. When the straight thirteenth-century dress with sweeping sleeves was finished it hung beautifully, but we did not think it brilliant enough, so it was sewn all over with real green beetle-wings, and a narrow border in Celtic designs, worked out in rubies and diamonds, hemmed all the edges.[90]

This sounds very similar to the costume design process today: the designer has an inspiration and conceives the garment, which expresses some abstract qualities about the character or about the production (protective armor, serpent references), she chooses the patterns after consulting historical texts, she has a construction house create it out of custom-made material, and then she tweaks her design after seeing the finished product onstage. However, there are several issues that complicate Comyns Carr's account. First, her phrase "we did not think it brilliant enough" is slippery. Ellen Terry claims authorship of the beetle wings idea in her memoirs, saying that several years before, an acquaintance of hers "wore a dress at supper one evening which gave me the idea for the Lady Macbeth dress, afterwards painted by Sargent. The bodice of Lady Randolph's[91] gown was trimmed all over with green beetles' wings. I told Mrs. Comyns Carr about it, and

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[90] Comyns Carr, *Reminiscences*, 211-212.

[91] Thanks to Martin Meisel for the suggestion that this may refer to Lady Randolph Churchill (née Jeanette Jerome), a colorful society beauty and mother of the future Prime Minister; from the correspondence of dates, I believe this is likely the case.

she remembered it when she designed my Lady Macbeth dress."[92] While Terry credits Comyns Carr as the designer, she herself takes credit for the most memorable feature of the design; she also links this feature to an aristocratic lady of fashion, recalling the eighteenth-century model of clothing circulation between stage and nobility.

Whatever the genesis of the beetle wings, several alterations to the costume were made at the demands of actors. Terry rejected the crown that Comyns Carr had custom-made in Paris because of its weight (saying, "What? That saucepan on my head, Alice?"), so Comyns Carr tried to recreate the design with lighter materials.[93] Terry also asked Comyns Carr to remove the jeweled border of the gown, for the same reason, although it is unclear if that was actually done.[94] Perhaps most significantly, however, Henry Irving appropriated for himself the cloak that Comyns Carr designed to go with this dress: after mentioning to Irving that she had designed Lady Macbeth's cloak to be the "top note" of the scene, Comyns Carr found that "when the first night came it was he who was wrapped in that scarlet cloak, whilst Nell [Terry] wore the less striking, though extremely becoming, heather-coloured wrap which I had hurriedly designed at the last moment."[95]

In addition, there seems to have been considerable tension between this costume and what Terry was trying to do with the character of Lady Macbeth. How Terry would play the role, which many thought wrong for her, "was beyond everything else the feature

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[92] Terry, *Story of My Life*, 353.

[93] Comyns Carr, *Reminiscences*, 212.

[94] Comyns Carr, *Reminiscences*, 212-13.

[95] Comyns Carr, *Reminiscences*, 213.

of the revival which had most keenly stimulated curiosity," as the *Weekly Irish Times* reported.[96] She chose to break radically from the accepted performance tradition, established by Sarah Siddons, of portraying Lady Macbeth as "a fiend [who] overpower[ed] and crush[ed] Macbeth."[97] Terry wrote to critic and trusted friend William Winter, "everyone seems to think Mrs. McB is a monstrousness and I can only see that she's a woman – a mistaken wife – and weak – not a dove – of course not – but first of all a wife."[98] She was also probably influenced by contemporary scholarship, including an essay by Joe Comyns Carr,[99] which "generalizes upon the Macbeths until they become female and male paradigms."[100] By focusing her interpretation on "Mrs. McB" as a woman and wife, Terry brought the part more in line with her other roles, in which she portrayed virtuous, old-fashioned women devoted to family and home. Terry's Lady Macbeth, after making her critical mistake in encouraging her husband to kill Duncan, crumbled almost immediately under the guilt of what they had done; she reinstated the swoon in II.iii after Macbeth recounts finding the murdered king (which had been cut by Siddons), reasoning, "Strung up, pitched up, she gives in at the end of his

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[96] "'Macbeth' at the Lyceum," *Weekly Irish Times, 5* Jan 1889.

[97] "The Playhouses," *Illustrated London News*, 5 January 1889 (summarizing the contrast between Siddons' and Terry's portrayals).

[98] Letter of 31 Dec 1888, quoted in Auerbach, *Ellen Terry*, 259.

[99] This may be a chicken-and-the-egg situation: a reporter for the *New York Tribune* claimed that Comyns Carr's essay was trumped up to justify Irving's and Terry's portrayals of the Macbeths: "Mr. Irving's Macbeth," *The New York Tribune,* 1 Jan 1889.

[100] Auerbach, *Ellen Terry,* 254.

speech when she finds he is safely through his story, and then she faints, really… from *relief*."[101]

Terry's interpretation was respectfully panned by most critics. The *Daily Telegraph* felt that "her desire to make the heroine a woman is in every way laudable; but as yet the effect is of a woman trying to assume a character against which nature protests. In reality, she has no venom in her… the gentle creature peeps out at every turn. She is playing at being a bad woman; she cannot be one. The Ellen Terry personality is unconquerable and asserts itself at every turn."[102] *The Scotsman* complained that "there was none of that tigerish intensity which… should always be found in Lady Macbeth."[103] As a correspondent to the *New York Tribune* put it: "She is human, natural, modern, sumptuously appareled, altogether charming: and as unlike Lady Macbeth as it is possible to be."[104] Almost every review mentions Terry's costume, however, as one of the best parts of her performance: "that it is convincing few will maintain. It is, however divinely beautiful."[105] At least one critic understood her wig choice as indicative of her larger interpretation of the character: "Miss Ellen Terry's red wig and long plaits descending almost to the ground, in place of the customary dark locks and sobriety of personal

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[101] Terry wrote this in the margin of her copy of *Macbeth*, reprinted in Manvell, *Ellen Terry,* 359.

[102] Quoted in "Discussing Henry Irving's Macbeth," *The Chicago Daily Tribune,* 27 Jan 1889, which is a digest of London critical reviews. The *Telegraph* review was probably written by Clement Scott (their drama critic at that time); however, it is omitted from a later publication of his reviews in book form, *From "The Bells" to "King Arthur": A critical record of the first-night productions at the Lyceum theatre from 1871 to 1895* (London: J. Macqueen, 1896).

[103] "London Theatricals," *The Scotsman*, 31 Dec 1888.
[104] "Mr. Irving's Macbeth," *The New York Tribune,* 1 Jan 1889

[105] The *Morning Post,* quoted in Charles Hiatt, *Ellen Terry and her Impersonations: an appreciation* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1898), 211. See also *The Manchester Guardian* review of 31 Dec 1888.

adornment, may be said to be the outward and visible tokens of the inward change that has been wrought in the accepted reading of Lady Macbeth."[106] However, this critic goes on to identify inconsistency in the new interpretation, perhaps responding to the misfit between the costume and Terry's acting choices: "the spectators Saturday evening were puzzled to reconcile the soft smiles with the terrible utterances; nor did Miss Terry herself appear to have quite made up her mind whether she was a blithe and companionable creature or a monster of depravity." Similarly, at the level of the overall production, Henry Labouchére complained that her "aesthetic Burne-Jonsey, Grosvenor Gallery version of Lady Macbeth, who roars as gently as any sucking dove" did not fit in with the rest of the harsh, dark production design.[107] While Comyns Carr was credited in the program, many reviews still attribute Lady Macbeth's appearance to Terry herself: "Her [Terry's] dressing of the part is extremely attractive, in quaintly, archaic, flowing variations of Saxon costume."[108] Ten years later, William Archer found it difficult to recall the details of Terry's performance, but clearly remembered the image preserved by Sargent: "I search my memory in vain for a single detail of elocution or of action. With some aid from Mr. Sargent, I remember the picture presented by Miss Terry in her wonderful green gown; but as to her performance…"[109]

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[106] Quoted in "Discussing Henry Irving's Macbeth," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 Jan 1889. Reviewer or publication not given, but the review is from London. While wigs are a different department today, Terry and Comyns Carr considered hairstyle to be part of costume – the wigs are often mentioned in the same breath as the dress in both women's memoirs, and in reviews.

[107] Henry Labouchére (politician and moonlighting drama critic) in *Truth* (undated), quoted in Manvel, *Ellen Terry*, 199-200.

[108] "Mr. Irving's Macbeth," *The New York Times*, 30 Dec 1888.

[109] William Archer, *Study and Stage: a yearbook of criticism* (London: Grand Richards, 1899), 105-106.

In her autobiography, Terry wrote that "Sargent suggested by this picture all that I should have liked to be able to convey in my acting as Lady Macbeth",[110] but the portrait seems quite at odds with her expressed conception of the character. After a few sketches in other poses, Sargent chose to show Lady Macbeth in a powerful gesture of self-crowning, reminiscent of *2 Henry IV* or of Napoleon Bonaparte; there is no record of such a moment taking place in Irving's production. This pose – arms over her head, chest thrust forward, hips back, face tilted back – shares some characteristics with contemporary images of prostitutes and even pornography.[111] The painting captures a far more self-empowered and sexualized Lady Macbeth than is suggested by photographic images of Terry in the role – both the staged publicity photos from the production and three extant *cartes de visite* of Terry as Lady Macbeth show her in submissive and restrained poses more in keeping with her other stage work as the "good woman." Strikingly, Sargent's painting omits the veil that is present in every photograph of Terry in this role. Terry (or perhaps Henry Irving, on her behalf) may have preferred a more conventionally feminine image in the medium of photography, which would circulate more widely and more quickly than a painting, to maintain Terry's on- and off-stage persona.

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[110] Terry, *Story of My Life,* 306.

[111] See Davis, *Actresses as Working Women* – her last chapter, "The Geography of Sex in Society and Theatre," provides an analysis of visual tropes, especially actresses' poses, which overlapped between the stage and pornography.

Fig 14 (left): The Beetle Dress in a staged production photo
Fig. 15 (right): A souvenir carte de visite of Terry as Lady M)

There may have been more leeway in the medium of painted portraiture, however. The painting would have been viewed initially only by artists and other members of the bohemian community who came to venues like the Grosvenor Gallery – people less likely to be offended by a representation of female power and sexuality, and who may have already known about the unconventional private life behind Terry's Victorian good-woman persona. The painting was a double mediation of Terry's performance: literally, in oil paint, but also as filtered through the eyes of the prestigious male artist. Authorized by Sargent, a subversive portrayal of Lady Macbeth might have been less threatening to Terry's reputation (and to potential viewers). Although inaccurate, the Victorian perception of photography as unmediated – showing people or events exactly as they

were, with the potential to reveal truth[112] – meant that this new technology was an especially risky area for Terry, in which she needed to present a conservative image. Prominent actors before Terry had used portraiture to craft an image (David Garrick as Richard III, for example); however, the new multiplicity of media and the faster and wider dissemination of images in the late nineteenth century placed a different weight on the choice to be painted in costume.

Nina Auerbach points out that "for the duration of the painting Lady Macbeth had a life beyond the Lyceum,"[113] recorded by Oscar Wilde's chance glimpse of Terry arriving for a sitting "in full regalia."[114] Auerbach suggests that Terry may have wanted to portray the character as more powerful and seductive, but felt constrained by off-stage circumstances to tone down that interpretation; outside the theatre, however, she may have felt free to present a more powerful portrayal to the painter. This reading highlights the power of Sargent's painting to cast an aesthetic gloss over unconventional female sexuality: Terry's powerful and sexy interpretation of Lady Macbeth, which could have destabilized her virtuous off-stage persona and perhaps hinted at unconventional aspects of her personal life, could exist unthreateningly in this mediated artistic representation, but not in the directly-accessible theatrical presentation. For Auerbach, Sargent's painting captured the message of the dress (serpent-like, powerful) rather than Terry's

[112] As Maria Elena Buszek puts it, "Stage performers manipulated their photography as easily as their performances, yet it was perceived by the public as being scientific and objective proof of the subject's essential personality." Maria Elena Buszek, "Representing 'Awarishness'" in *Drama Review* 43.4 (Winter 1999): 157.

[113] Auerbach, *Ellen Terry*, 263.

[114] Wilde wrote, "The street that on a wet and dreary morning has vouchsafed the vision of Lady Macbeth in full regalia magnificently seated in a four-wheeler can never again be as other streets: it must always be full of wonderful possibilities." Quoted in Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, 201.

performance in this role: "The Lady Macbeth dress, and Sargent's crowning vision of its meaning, were definitive embodiments of Ellen Terry's disjunction from her assigned roles."[115] Besides Terry's praise for Sargent's portrait, there is some additional evidence that she wanted to find both a darker and a more personal note with this character: asked by critic Clement Scott "But was Lady Macbeth good?" she replied "No, she was not good, but not so much worse than many women you know."[116] Terry also made several comments in the margins of her script that hint at a more powerful and manipulative interpretation than what seems to have come across to critics. Next to the speech in which she urges Macbeth to kill Duncan, she writes "Closer in, she too plotting. Charm. Serpent" and later on Terry "notes the horrid smile adopted by Mrs Siddons. She must use this smile herself when saying the lines, 'I have drugged their possets' [writing in] 'Smile. Devil.'"[117] Auerbach's claim that the costume (rather than Terry's performance) inspired the portrait is borne out by Sargent's appreciation of the gown to Comyns Carr: "Sargent said to me: 'You and I ought to have signed that together, Alice, for I could not have done it if you had not invented the dress.'"[118]

PICCOLOMINI AND TERRY: THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY

Responses to the beetle dress reveal that audiences were beginning to read costumes in a new way, as part of the fictional dramatic world, similar to reactions to

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[115] Auerbach, *Ellen Terry*, 265.

[116] Clement Scott, *Ellen Terry* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company [1900]), 119. Perhaps significantly, Scott notes that this conversation occurred the day *after* he printed his review of the production.

[117] Quoted in Manvell, *Ellen Terry*, 357-358. He published all of Terry's marginalia in her Macbeth script as an appendix to this biography.

[118] Comyns Carr, *Reminiscences,* 300.

Piccolomini's costumes as Violetta. As might have been expected with multiple designers,[119] several critics noted that the Lady Macbeth costume was somewhat at odds with the rest of the garments in the production. Oscar Wilde commented, "Judging from the banquet, lady Macbeth seems an economical housekeeper, and evidently patronizes local industries for her husband's clothes and her servant's liveries; but she takes care to do all her own shopping in Byzantium."[120] While certainly tongue-in-cheek, this remark reveals two relatively new expectations of costume design: that it be unified across the production, and that it express something about the world of the play, rather than about an actress' taste, status or personality. While new expectations of and attention to costumes as a part of the theatrical experience would eventually result in the need for professional specialists in stage design (of whom Comyns Carr is a forerunner), performers such as Piccolomini and Terry were an important engine of this change across the nineteenth century.

To return to Paola Bignami's comment on the instability of the referent "theatrical costume," both Piccolomini and Terry demonstrate the impact of a particular body – and a particular personality – inside a costume. The expanded public access not only to costume images, but also to images of stars in their own clothing, offered celebrity performers a more complex set of visual tools with which to craft their characters and

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[119] The costumes other than Terry's were designed by painter Charles Cattermole, according to various reviews. It is unclear how much design freedom Cattermole had or wanted – Irving definitely had a hand in the costume choices. The costumes were made onsite, according to an advance piece in *The Magazine of Art*: "large workshops attached to the theatre, peopled with forty skilled 'hands,' have been busily occupied for months… no outside 'costumier' being employed as middleman. Altogether no fewer than 408 dresses have been made." M.H. Spielmann, "A Shakespearean Revival: Macbeth," *The Magazine of Art*, Jan 1889.

[120] Quoted in Graham Robertson, *Time Was,* 151.

their off-stage personae. I propose that in the development of costume design, both Piccolomini and Terry made a key contribution in linking their artistic expression – costumes' meaning on stage, within the diegesis of the production – with their construction of themselves as celebrities. They experimented with the function of costume in constructing the fictional, in a double sense: they used costumes to express something about the characters they played onstage, but also to convey information about their supposed off-stage lives, whether true, slightly altered, or entirely fictional.

Although they have their differences,[121] and are certainly not the only examples of nineteenth-century performers using costume creatively, Marietta Piccolomini and Ellen Terry are interesting together because they use the same tool in opposite ways: we can think of costume design as working in the same capacity but with the reverse outcome for Terry as it did for Piccolomini. For each woman, costumes protected her private life, while also enhancing her professional fame. Piccolomini used her on- and offstage images to advertise her chaste, aristocratic personal life and counter her risqué role; for Terry, costume design and clever deployment of the new "celebrity machine"[122] allowed her onstage image to obscure her private life, making it possible for Terry to maintain the reputation of traditional female virtue that her roles suggested. Jean Baudrillard describes a Borges story in which, first, a map is created as a representation of a geographical territory; as the story goes on, however, the map grows, spreading out over every corner of the land until it obliterates the referent, leaving us in "a real without

[121] There are many other dimensions in which Piccolomini and Terry do not align: length of career, genre (new opera versus canonical play), the use of partnering designers, etc. The impact of these differences on costume choices remains to be explored in future research; nevertheless, I do contend that we can identify a certain similarity in these two performers' entwining of costume/clothing images to construct characters and celebrity personae.
[122] Eltis, "Reputation, Celebrity and the Late-Victorian Actress," 170-171.

origin or reality: a hyperreal."[123] I suggest that we can use this model to conceptualize the difference between these two case studies: as a flip-flop in the relationship between the "real" territory (personal life) and the mapped "representation" (stage image).[124] Piccolomini's stage portrayal of prostitution (the representation) could not overwrite her "real" life as virtuous aristocrat; however, Terry's scandalous personal life *could* be hidden or replaced by her "good woman" stage roles and her artistic costumes.

While this shift from Piccolomini to Terry may simply reflect two individuals' differing uses of costume and image reproduction, it may suggest something larger about the state of visual culture and celebrity in 1855 versus 1888. In thirty-three years, celebrity image reproduction had grown from a very new technology to a thriving, ubiquitous part of consumer culture. Terry's case suggests that while audiences had become more sophisticated readers of costume and dress, a skillful image-maker was able to stay one step ahead, manipulating popular opinion. Terry's fabrication of an offstage persona was so successful as to inhibit her portrayal of characters that did not conform to it: the review that claimed she was not appropriate as Lady Macbeth because "the Ellen

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[123] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1. The Jorge Luis Borges story he references is "Del rigor en la ciencia" ["Of Exactitude in Science" or "On Rigor in Science"], first published under a pseudonym within a longer piece called "Museo," in *Los Anales de Buenos Aires*, *1:3* [March 1946]. In English it can be found in *A Universal History of Infamy*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (London: Penguin Books, 1975). Borges' story itself draws upon a mapping concept from Josiah Royce's *The World and the Individual* (1899), an image probably inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893) – so this "citation of a citation that itself is presented in the form of a citation" actually has its roots in the same period as the Lyceum *Macbeth* (Daniel Selcer, *Philosophy and the Book: Early Modern Figures of Material Inscription* [New York: Continuum, 2010] 62).

[124] I am building here on Susan Bordo's application of this metaphor to women's bodies, specifically regarding eating disorders: see her chapter "Hunger as Ideology" in Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: feminism, western culture and the body* (University of California Press, 1995).

Terry personality is unconquerable and asserts itself at every turn,"[125] is ironic because the actress had "produced [this] private life for public consumption."[126] While Piccolomini's private life was also carefully revealed in the press, a significant shift occurred with Terry, since her persona was not substantiated by fact. Newly-available mechanisms of self-promotion, by the end of the century, were capable of building name-recognition and associations into a strong brand – a "hyperreal" – regardless of "real" circumstances.

[125] *Daily Telegraph* review quoted above.

[126] Eltis, "Reputation, Celebrity and the Late-Victorian Actress," 172.

Annie Holt
Chapter 3

COUTURE COSTUMES: ART, CRAFT, AND COMMERCIALISM

The triangular relation of fashion, commercialism, and theatre, in which almost all of the major French couture houses participated in the years before World War I,[1] complicated the experience of an elite audience member and his/her positioning vis-à-vis the stage: at times wearing the exact same gowns as the society ladies who watched them, actresses could no longer be so easily sartorially identified as other. The multivalent presence of the actress in a couture gown awakened anxieties about what or whom could be created, displayed, or sold. Adjectives like "stagey" and "theatrical," used as pejoratives, sought to establish and police the boundaries between real clothing (and perhaps real women) and their onstage representations. Such critiques reveal the promise and the danger of *haute couture*: that it could transform the character of ordinary wearers. They obscure, however, the mutually beneficial relationship between theatre and fashion in this period: while "theatrical" clothing was looked down upon in some ways, on-stage garments also played a key role in turning fashion into art.

From its inception, *haute couture* struggled with a tension between art (the couture garment as a unique, beautiful, elite object) and craft (this same garment as a commercial product, created through factory-like technologies of production). Largely through a productive relationship with theatre, I argue, couture garments managed to posit and resolve this craft/art dialectic in one object. Couture costumes were both "art" pieces and "real" everyday clothes, available for purchase. This synthesis held together

[1] Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 5.

only through the extraordinary authority and status acquired by the fashion designer in the late nineteenth-century; his/her new role as "artist" both drew upon and influenced costume design work for the stage.

Charles Frederick Worth: artistic authority

The birth of the high fashion designer is often dated from a specific, highly theatrical interaction between dressmaker Charles Frederick Worth and Empress Éugenie of France, which reveals the important development of the designer's authority in this new genre. Worth was invited to present a dress on approval to the Empress in 1860, with a promise of more orders if she liked it; he chose to make the trial gown out of Lyonnaise silk brocade. As recounted by Diana de Marly:

> When Worth unpacked their precious creation, heavy with magnificence, the empress frowned. 'We don't like brocade. It looks like curtain material.' … All would have been lost but for the entry of Napoleon III himself at that moment… Worth took advantage of the emperor's entry and tried a political approach. Lyon, he said, was a very republican city, hostile to the emperor's policies, but that attitude could be changed significantly if the empress would only wear more products from its factories. Moreover, their majesties were to visit Lyon later that year so a gesture towards the silk industry would be very wise. Napoleon III agreed. He told the empress that she had a duty to support his industrial policy, and that she was to wear the brocade dress once or twice… [Worth] gained a double advantage… not only was he to dress the empress, but the emperor's decision gave Worth the authority to tell her to wear something which she did not like, if he felt that it would be good for a particular product.[2]

Haute couture, predicated on the designer's authority over his elite clientele, thus came into being firmly tied to commerce and the industrial revolution; from this moment, the balance of power in clothing production shifted significantly from customer to designer.

With the spread of the sewing machine and the advent of ready-to-wear clothing, which reached critical mass around the middle of the nineteenth century in Paris and

[2] Diana De Marly, *Worth: Father of Haute Couture* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1980), 40.

London, clothing production changed drastically for all sections of society. At the lower end of the market, new clothing could be bought already made up in a choice of standard sizes, perhaps at one of the new department stores; for upper-class women, there was the new option of *haute* or *grande couture*. Fashion historian Philippe Perrot identifies the co-dependency of the two new clothing production methods: "The birth of *grande couture*… was not unrelated to the expansion of the ready-to-wear industry. On the one hand, its luxury and refinement distinguished it from ready-to-wear without ambiguity; on the other, it borrowed some of the former's methods."[3] Although couture garments were more customized than ready-to-wear and were sometimes marketed as unique objects, they were really just variations on a standard understructure. Worth "used the techniques of the industrial age, evolving a series of standardized patterns with interchangeable parts. Thus it was possible for a gown to consist of standard bodice type A, with sleeves pattern B, and skirt pattern C. These would then be put together on the sewing machine, which made long seams and the trimmings. The finishing, the embroidery, the perfect cut, were done by hand."[4] Starting with Worth, couture designers would license certain patterns to be reproduced by other dressmakers or as ready-to-wear; models that were not licensed were frequently found on the mass market anyway in the form of pirated copies. As Nancy Troy explains,

> Thus Worth's business, and haute couture generally, were forged out of seemingly incommensurate elements: on the one hand, extremely expensive items destined for elite patronage and, on the other, widespread commercial distribution at reduced prices; in other words, models described as unique

[3] Philippe Perrot*, Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A history of clothing in the nineteenth century.* Trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 184. Originally published in French 1981.

[4] De Marly, *Worth,* 102.

> creations were nevertheless subject to endless adaptation and repetition: the original and the reproduction at one and the same time.[5]

Although (or perhaps *because*) Worth's methods of production were in fact heavily influenced by the new industrial, impersonal production of ready-to-wear,[6] he sought to allay charges of industrialization or commercialism by promoting his products as art pieces and casting himself as an artist. "He was applying the standards and principles of fine art to dress design, and elevating the subject to a higher place. It was not simply a craft; it was part of aesthetics."[7] Worth personally took control over all parts of the creation process, in what Nancy Troy identifies as his true innovation: "for the first time, fashionable women's wear was the creation of a single designer who not only selected the fabrics and ornaments that made up any given outfit but who developed the design and produced the final product."[8] Mary E. Davis links this new process of sole authorship with Worth's aspirations to make clothing into art: "as if to reinforce the point that his fashions were on a par with painting and sculpture, the designer included a label bearing the signature of his atelier in every garment."[9] He began to dress the part of the

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[5] Troy, 21.

[6] See Philippe Perrot*, Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 184: "The birth of *grande couture*… was not unrelated to the expansion of the ready-to-wear industry. On the one hand, its luxury and refinement distinguished it from ready-to-wear without ambiguity; on the other, it borrowed some of the former's methods." As described by de Marly, Worth "used the techniques of the industrial age, evolving a series of standardized patterns with interchangeable parts. Thus it was possible for a gown to consist of standard bodice type A, with sleeves pattern B, and skirt pattern C. These would then be put together on the sewing machine, which made long seams and the trimmings. The finishing, the embroidery, the perfect cut, were done by hand" (De Marly, *Worth,* 102).

[7] De Marly, *Worth* 110.

[8] Troy, *Couture Culture,* 19.

artist himself: "Worth began to stop dressing like a gentleman, and transformed himself into an artist proper, modeled after Rembrandt, with a velvet beret which he wore all the time, a flowing coat edged with fur at the neck, and with a floppy silk scarf knotted at this through instead of a cravat. This was accepted artistic dress of the period; Wagner wore a velvet beret."[10]

Walter Benjamin insists that when a mechanical reproduction is made of a work of art, "the quality of its presence is always depreciated."[11] Troy sees reproduction as constitutive of high fashion: "not only is any original couture creation based on a model designed for reproduction, but in order for that model to become an established fashion, it must first be circulated in the form of multiple copies."[12] If couture was to become art, however, it would need, at the very least, to be able to point to an original artwork somewhere, underpinning a sea of reproductions: as Benjamin puts it, "the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity."[13] This is where fashion's engagement with theatre becomes key. Troy claims that in fashion's use of the theatre, "the compelling purpose was to marshal a form of expression that could be associated with high culture in the effort to protect haute couture as an art form from the menace of uncontrolled commerce."[14] Building on this, I suggest that we can identify a specific

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[9] Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion, Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 23.

[10] De Marly, *Worth*, 110.

[11] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 221.

[12] Troy, *Couture Culture,* 259.

[13] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 220.

function of couture costumes on the stage, beyond just an association with high art: as a public display of the "original" art piece which worked to guarantee all the copies. On the stage, the real couture object – with all the art of personal fitting, trimming, finishing, and the finest materials – could be viewed by the public with the "unarmed eye" with its links to "uniqueness and permanence" that a photograph or other reproduction cannot supply.[15] Benjamin argues that "the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual," and in my reading, the live experience of the garment's presence onstage stands in for the "ritual function" which Benjamin sees as necessary to the artwork's "aura."[16]

Starting with Worth, fashion designers who worked for the stage took pains to emphasize the authenticity of these onstage garments as elite couture objects (often through puff pieces in the press). While Worth's gowns were not always historically accurate – he often created period costumes with contemporary touches – "there was no lowering of house standards for theatre costume. The best materials were employed, as in masquerade clothes or fashionable wear, not theatrical tat. The silks, the velvets, the jewels, were all real."[17] Maison Worth became the place to go for star actresses wanting to display status and taste by wearing the very best.[18] While use of these "real" materials

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[14] Troy, *Couture Culture,* 251.

[15] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 223.

[16] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 224.

[17] De Marly, *Worth*, 183.

[18] Worth dressed several actresses from the Comédie Française, including Marie Delaporte, Eugénie Doch, Maria Favart, and Sarah Bernhardt. As Paola Bignami writes, "La Maison Worth rappresenta, nella seconda metà del secolo XX, per sovrane e grandi dame, categorie tra le quali aspirano a entrare le attrici, una sorta di *status simbol* [sic]" -- Paola Bignami, *Storia del costume teatrale: oggetti per esibirsi nello spettacolo e in società* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2005), 156. See also Diana de Marly, *Costume on the Stage, 1600-1940* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982), 36; Diana de Marly, *Worth* 171.

had no dramaturgical purpose – it would be impossible to tell whether jewels were real from the audience – it offered both actresses and audiences an up-close and live encounter with the auratic object. In addition to the garments onstage, theatres also functioned as a kind of gallery for *haute couture* in the spectacle of the celebrity courtesans who appeared in their boxes nightly to "display their toilettes."[19]

Worth was also famous for his masquerade costumes for both men and women,[20] which were even more sumptuous than his everyday clothing: "whereas day-wear [from Worth] was relatively simple, masquerade clothes called for elaborate detail" and could function as *tour-de-force* displays of Worth's imagination and the craft of his couture atelier.[21] Worth's artistic aspirations served him well here, as he frequently copied gowns from paintings of an earlier age, especially "portraits by famous painters, such as Holbein, Van Dyck and Gainsborough."[22] These gowns, first painted and then remade as masquerade costumes for elite society ladies, capture the entwined relationship of fashion, art and theatre; they also indicate the entanglement of "real" clothing and costume. Masquerade gowns, by representing a midpoint, reveal that fashion and costume existed on a continuum rather than being sharply demarcated – when fashion designers made costumes both for spectacular society events and for the professional stage, the two categories began to blur.

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[19] Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie,* 170.

[20] The only occasion for which Worth made men's clothing. De Marly, *Worth,* 71.

[21] De Marly, *Worth,* 69.

[22] De Marly, *Worth*, 61.

Lucile: the fashion of transformation

Joel Kaplan and Sheila Stowell write that the 1890s "saw the first real challenge to Worth's monopoly of on-and off-stage fashion" by rivals offering more "stagey" garments.[23] First among these rivals in England was Lady Lucy Duff-Gordon, known by her *nom-de-couture* Lucile. In 1897, after designing some gowns worn onstage by individual actresses, she was engaged to make all the women's costumes for *The Liars*, a society comedy by Henry Arthur Jones, at the Criterion Theatre. She went on to design more than a hundred society comedies and musicals,[24] of which the best-known are *The Merry Widow* (1907) and her years with the Ziegfeld Follies (1915-1920). As Lucile and several critics note, however, her association with theatre was not always positive: she wrote in her autobiography that "in spite of the fact that I dressed royal ladies, and so was smiled on by the immediate Court circle, I shocked a great many people, who brought against me the terrible indictment (in those days) of making 'stagey' clothes."[25] Ultimately, however, Lucile demonstrated the advantages fashion could find in a skillful deployment of theatricality, and in blurring the line between street and stage.

Duff-Gordon's memoirs (1932) record a career tightly entwined with theatre from the very beginning: her first professional creation was inspired by "a tea-gown I had seen Letty Lind wear on the stage"[26] and she claimed that "It was *The Liars* that finally

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[23] Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10.

[24] See the very helpful Appendix II, recording Lucile's astonishing number of stage and film credits, in Randy Bryan Bigham, *Lucile, her Life by Design: Sex, Style and the Fusion of Theatre and Couture (*San Francisco: McEvie Press Group, 2012).

[25] Duff-Gordon, *Discretions and Indiscretions* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1932), 66.

[26] Lucy Duff-Gordon, *Discretions and Indiscretions,* 37.

established my name."[27] She recognized the power of the theatre as a public display of fashion, telling the *New York World* that "The stage sets the fashion… No private individual can set a fashion no matter how wealthy or influential she may be, for after all, who sees her?"[28] In addition, her garments moved back and forth frequently from stage to street, blurring the distinction between art and life. Her stage garments were very often copied for private use: the actress Mary Moore wore one of her Lucile costumes to a society event and was "confronted by three admirers in identical outfits."[29] In some cases this copying even blurred fiction and reality. Duff-Gordon recounts how she recreated a stage costume she had made for the play *The Catch of the Season* for a private client, and the client met her rich future husband wearing this dress: "*The Catch of the Season* dress had brought in the 'catch of the season' in husbands!"[30]

Lucile's creations, on and off stage, were praised repeatedly for their skillful handling of delicate fabrics, exquisite embroidered detail, and subtle variations of pale shades. Cecil Beaton recalled her gowns for the theatre as "masterpieces of intricate workmanship… Lucile worked with soft materials, delicately springling [sic] them with bead or sequin embroidery, with cobweb lace insertions, true lovers' knots, and garlands of minute roses. Her colour sense was so subtle that the delicacy of detail could scarcely be seen at a distance, though the effect she created was of an indefinable shimmer."[31] Although such details were best appreciated up close, like Worth, Lucile's garments for

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[27] Duff-Gordon, *Discretions and Indiscretions,* 46.

[28] Quoted in Bigham, *Lucile, her Life by Design,* 71.

[29] Quoted in Kaplan and Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion*, 36.

[30] Duff-Gordon, *Discretions and Indiscretions,* 95-96.

[31] Cecil Beaton, *The Glass of Fashion*, (London: Artillery House, 1954), 32.

the stage were made to the same construction standards as her street wear and even bore the same label. In a survey of extant Lucile garments, Amy de la Haye and Valerie Mendes found that theatre costumes "were constructed with infinite care and meticulous attention to detail, rather than hurriedly assembled with inferior materials solely for dramatic impact" concluding that "because both theatre costume and fashion with the Lucile label shared careful design, and precise cut and construction, it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other."[32] Lucile herself suggested that the clothing/costume difference was one of degree rather than content, telling the *Washington Post* in 1915, "A theatrical costume contains an idea. This idea, for the sake of the footlights, is over-accentuated and exaggerated. It is raised in pitch, to use musical expression… To make it practical for everyday wear it is only necessary to lower the pitch to suit the environment, and yet no harm is done to the beauty of the idea itself."[33]

Inspired by her theatrical work, Duff-Gordon was one of the first to present fashion designs in a live show with models on a stage or runway, accompanied by music and mood lighting.[34] The experience was compared to a visit to the theatre by many. She also created a more genteel showroom: her shop in upscale Hanover Square looked like "a fine old mansion such as peeresses dwell in, a resplendent salon such as peeresses trail

[32] Amy de la Haye and Valerie D. Mendes, *Lucile LTD: London, Paris, New York and Chicago*. (London: V&A Publishing, 2009), 184.

[33] Quoted in Bigham, *Lucile, her life by design*, 126

[34] Lucile is often credited with inventing the fashion show, a credit also claimed by her rival Paul Poiret. In fact, French couture houses had been exhibiting new garments on live models since Worth, but Lucile did raise the level of theatricality, incorporating footlights and music, and serving refreshments after the presentation. See, among others, Bigham, *Lucile, her life by design,* 35-36.

through, [with] a little stage such as peeresses maintain for their private theatricals."[35] It had a garden behind, in which Lucile's spring and summer collections were presented in a garden party environment. Maison Lucile was famous for offering clients tea, both after runway presentations and during regular shopping visits to the salon; the *New York Times* enthused over the "delicious *pate de foie gras* sandwiches and little cakes," concluding that "all the appointments were quite as perfect as if it had been a fashionable private tea."[36] In effect, Duff-Gordon created a setting for customers, in which they could enter the scene, becoming "peeresses" or any other characters they liked. This ambiance, along with the exquisite deportment and flawless accessorizing of the Lucile mannequins –who were often indistinguishable from the fashionable clientele at these events – created an innovative and commercial slippage between audience and performers.

While the charge of "stagey" may have been used to describe Lucile's theatrical presentation, risqué elements, and lavish ornamentation, there is a more interesting possibility: this word may actually refer to a certain relationship between the wearer and the garment which was usually associated with the theatre. Lucile's gowns, on and off stage, were meant to be legible in a new way, revealing attributes of the woman's or character's personality: clothes that said too much. According to Richard Sennett, "the theatre costume of the 1890s seemed truly revolutionary at the time precisely because it created expression for the body which went beyond the terms of deviance and conformity. The audience found an unrestricted liberty in stage costume which they could not find in their own street clothes"[37] – unless, perhaps, they wore Lucile.

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[35] Marie Beynon Ray, quoted in Bigham, *Lucile, her life by design,* 63.

[36] Quoted in Bigham, *Lucile, her life by design,* 36.

A "MANNEQUIN" PARADE IN 1913
in the garden at Lucile's, 23, Hanover Square

Fig. 16: models and clients at a 1913 "parade" in Lucile's garden: difficult to tell who's who.

Lucile was known for what she called her "personality gowns", which began as a commitment to a unique creation for each customer, tailored to her inner characteristics; Duff-Gordon believed that "dresses, if they are to give any pleasure to their wearer, must become a part of her personality," and described a lengthy process of getting to know each client before designing for her.[38] While this process probably only existed at the beginning of her career – later, Maison Lucile presented a number of pre-made models for customers to choose from, like other couture designers – her interest in clothing as individual expression translated into new ways of designing for the stage. Lucile was "the first costumier to ask us to let her read the play, so that she might the better

[37] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York : Knopf, 1977), 191.

[38] Duff-Gordon, *Discretions and Indiscretions,* 94.

understand how to garb the different characters" according to actress Mary Moore.[39] "Stagey" could describe the way in which Lucile reversed the Victorian trend towards "protective" clothing that concealed the wearer, in favor of expressive gowns that revealed something about the wearer, which usually was only seen on the stage.[40]

Later in her career, Lucile gave her gown models names that conveyed a situation or trait of the wearer, instead of a number as other couture houses did (following Worth). This received much attention in the press: famous titles include "The Sighing Sound of Lips Unsatisfied" and "A Frenzied Song of Amorous Things." Of captions, especially in fashion advertising, Roland Barthes writes that "the primary function of speech is to immobilize perception at a certain level of intelligibility… an image inevitably involves several levels of perception and that the reader of images has at his disposal a certain amount of freedom… language eliminates this freedom, but also this uncertainty."[41] By captioning her garments in this way, Duff-Gordon fixed or at least indicated the meaning she wished them to convey, emphasizing her own power as the author/designer over the interpretation of the reader/wearer. While on one level this is congruent with her earlier focus on clothing that "says something" about the woman, it changes the balance of power between the garment and the wearer. Joseph Roach has recently argued that in Lucile's work, clothes "are not mere objects, but rather provocations to enact behaviours or initiate social processes. They *perform*, in a word."[42] This raises the question of

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[39] Quoted in Kaplan and Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion*, 40.

[40] See also Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 174.

[41] Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System,* trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 13.

[42] Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 87.

whether in a way the clothes themselves carried the meaning, rather than serving the woman or the play. As Roach goes on to note, this conception of clothing highlights "the paradoxical impact of its expressiveness: the act of covering someone up with mere dead matter… appears to reveal something magical about the life inside."[43] Lucile's clothing literally had a message – a caption – but perhaps instead of reflecting the interior qualities of the wearer, the gowns instead expressed the designer's vision. Marlis Schweitzer suggests that "Lucile encouraged her clients to identify with her models… as reflections of what they hoped to become."[44] Dresses that *in themselves* expressed certain qualities offered the possibility that these qualities could be acquired through purchasing the gown: that youth, beauty, perhaps even class were for sale.

The potential of a Lucile design to transform the wearer (onstage and off) is demonstrated by the case of the Merry Widow and her iconic hat. For the English premiere of Franz Lehár's operetta (1907 at Daly's Theatre), manager George Edwards selected one of the chorus girls, Lily Elsie, to become the leading lady. According to Duff-Gordon, Edwards brought Elsie to Maison Lucile for a complete make-over, telling the designer, "I have the idea that she can play the part of Sonia and astonish them all. Now this is where you can help me enormously. You must give her a personality, and coach her so that she can keep it up."[45] Duff-Gordon put her through the same training she gave the Lucile mannequins, teaching her to walk and move differently and restyling her hair; she claims that "there was not a movement across the stage, not a single gesture

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[43] Roach, *It,* 87.

[44] Marlis Schweitzer, *When Broadway was the Runway: Theatre, Fashion and American Culture.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 197.

[45] Duff-Gordon, *Discretions and Indiscretions,* 109.

of her part in *The Merry Widow* that we did not go through together."[46] Apparently, Edwards got what he asked for: the *Times of London* review of *The Merry Widow* praised Elsie as "Not content with making an unusually beautiful picture in Parisian and Marsovian dresses, she puts meaning into what she does, and appears to have a personality to express."[47] For Cecil Beaton, Elsie was "perhaps the first actress of her genre to captivate the popular imagination by means of her ladylike restraint and dignified grace"[48] – qualities that, according to Duff-Gordon, were instilled through her Lucile gowns and training. After *The Merry Widow*, Elsie wore Lucile garments almost exclusively onstage and for her private wardrobe.

The most famous part of Lucile's costumes for *The Merry Widow* was the large hat Elsie wore in Act III[49]: as one reviewer enthused, "an immense black crinoline hat, banded round the crown with silver and two huge pink silk roses nestling under the brim. Oh! The sensation of the Merry Widow Hat!"[50] Duff-Gordon recalled that this hat "carried the name of 'Lucile,' its creator, all over Europe… [it] lasted longer than most fashion crazes, for the charm of the play kept it alive."[51] (Lucile was still selling Merry

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[46] Duff-Gordon, *Discretions and Indiscretions,* 109.

[47] *The Times of London*, July 10 1907.

[48] Beaton, *The Glass of Fashion*, 26.

[49] Naomi Tarrant has suggested that Lucile's "claim to have designed the 'Merry Widow' hat may well not be true for this is credited on the programme to her next door neighbour in Hanover Square, the milliner Gainsborough" (Naomi E. A. Tarrant, "The 'It' Girls" [review], in *Costume* 21 [1987]: 112). While this is true, Gainsborough may have merely executed a Lucile design – Lucile did design hats, as numerous advertisements of this period attest. It is unlikely that Duff-Gordon would have ceded this key area of design to another, especially given her make-over of Elsie which involved a special hairstyle. In any case, the hat as a part of the *Merry Widow* costume was strongly associated with Lucile in the press.

[50] Louise Heilgers, "Delightful Dresses at Daly's" in *Play Pictorial* (London) 10 (1907).

Fig. 17: Lily Elsie as Sonia in The Merry Widow; gown and hat by Lucile

[51] Duff-Gordon, 108.

Widow" gowns and hats as late as 1913.[52]) Schweitzer has described the way in which the "Merry Widow" hat created a frenzy amongst New York "matinee girls," in one case even provoking a riot when the New Amsterdam Theatre offered a promotional give-away of the hats to patrons.[53] In addition, Schweitzer documents the disruption these hats caused when worn by women in the theatre audience, obstructing the view of spectators seated behind such hat-wearers; in these situations, large hats could function as "a sign of the independence, fashionable-ness, and purchasing power of single female theatre-goers.[54]

Especially in situations where actors wear fashionable contemporary clothes, Monks writes, "It is often unclear if the actor is the character's body, the leader of fashion, or an object to be consumed by the audiences… The actor is often closer to being the object of fashion than its consumer."[55] In the case of Lily Elsie and the hat, she represented all three simultaneously, and as a newly-minted fashion object (thanks to Lucile), Elsie offered the audience the possibility that they too might be so transformed. As an accessory, and as such, less of an investment than a couture gown (or even a copy of one), the "Merry Widow" hat was available to a wider section of the audience than usual – many women could afford to participate in the circulation between stage, couture house and street fashion by purchasing a similar item. As it circulated as a fashion commodity, the hat was simultaneously a synecdoche of the *Merry Widow* costume, a

[52] See "Ethereal Effects in Chiffon: The 'Merry Widow' dress and other creations" in *The Illustrated London News*, 24 May 1913 (World of Women supplement).

[53] Schweitzer, *When Broadway was the Runway,* 1-4.

[54] Schweitzer, *When Broadway was the Runway,* 44-50.

[55] Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 40.

sign of glamour and fashion, and also a real object with the power to "perform" a transformation for women who purchased it.[56]

A second meaning of "stagey" reveals another way in which Lucile, and fashionable dressmakers like her in this period, developed the practice of costume design. Lucile was one of the first to dress all the leading ladies of a given production, a new practice in London theatre of the 1890s. Kaplan and Stowell suggest that critiques of Lucile's costume work as "theatrical" reflected a desire for realism on the part of the audience (or at least the fashion critics): "the more co-ordinated a production looked the less it resembled the milieu it was meant to replicate…[because] of the impossibility of a drawing room filled with the work of one designer."[57] While a few other dressmakers had designed all the ladies' costumes previously, Kaplan and Stowell argue that "Lucile's style was so unique that displayed *en masse* her costumes called attention to themselves in unsettling ways."[58] Lucile thus introduced to productions of society comedies the kind of insistence on aesthetic unity pioneered by directors like Saxe-Meiningen and striven for in historical productions like Irving's Lyceum Shakespeare revivals. A stage full of

[56] While *The Merry Widow* is not a story about sartorial transformation, this costume has some interesting links to *Pygmalion* that may indicate the degree to which the costume was associated with the project of female re-fashioning. For *Pygmalion*'s premiere in 1912, Shaw insisted on Eliza Doolittle (played by Mrs. Pat Campbell) wearing a large-brimmed hat, although by that time flower-sellers were usually wearing sailor hats (see Kaplan and Stowell 74-75). When the play was adapted into the movie-musical *My Fair Lady* (1964), in the ball scene in which Eliza's transformation is complete, art director Cecil Beaton copied Audrey Hepburn's ball dress from one of Lucile's gowns from the 1907 *Merry Widow* (see Meredith Etherington-Smith and Jeremy Pilcher, *The 'It' Girls: Lucy, Lady Duff-Gordon, the Couturière 'Lucile', and Elinor Glyn, Romantic Novelist* [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986] 89).

[57] Kaplan and Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion,* 42.

[58] Kaplan and Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion,* 42.

Lucile's costumes unmistakably carried the stamp of one artistic consciousness, linking her work to more avant-garde stages and perhaps even to Wagner's ideal of *gesamtkunstwerk*. In fact, Duff-Gordon herself suggested a comparison to Wagner, telling the *Los Angeles Times* in 1908 that "like Wagner, who transferred 'psychological ideas into music,' she was bringing a deeper meaning to clothes."[59]

Ultimately, it was not the close relationship between onstage gowns that truly unsettled critics, but the close relationship between the costumes and the gowns in the audience. Unlike Worth, Lady Duff-Gordon was born into the same class as the society ladies she dressed. She worked simultaneously in high fashion and for the stage, even though most London dressmakers "curtailed stage work after receiving the Drawing Room commissions that enabled her to call herself 'Court Dressmaker.'"[60] It is perhaps precisely *because of*, rather than "in spite of the fact that [she] dressed royal ladies and so was smiled on by the immediate Court circle" that she "shocked a great many people," who were left wondering exactly what the dressmaker's art could accomplish. In the case of *The Liars*, the Criterion had recently been refurbished in a way that enhanced the congruence between stage and auditorium: the program credited one interior decorating firm "for work on both sides of the proscenium, [so] patrons of the recently redecorated auditorium… were aware of settling into seats reupholstered by the same hands responsible for the comfort of their on-stage doubles. The move had the effect of erasing what barriers remained between the society worlds of stage and stalls, creating a new intimacy that brought with it an increased vulnerability."[61] This vulnerability – an

[59] The *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 1908. Quoted in Bigham, *Lucile, her life by design,* 211.

[60] Kaplan and Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion,* 10.

insecurity about where the auditorium ended and the stage began – required policing of the border by words like "stagey." By applying this label to Lucile's costumes, critics and their society readers attempted to hold themselves apart from the spectacle.

Together with her sister (the novelist Eleanor Glyn), Lucy Duff-Gordon broke down the boundaries between society lady, professional beauty, actress, and author. To Worth's assumption of authority based on an understanding of market forces and construction of himself as an artist, Lucile added the claims of class privilege, a potent combination. As Lucile's assistant (and later celebrity costume designer) Howard Greer put it, she was "revered and respected for her taste for surely it is that of a gentlewoman who designs for another of the same type."[62] Barthes argues that "taste" operates as cover for class: "the superiority of status, which for democratic reasons could no longer be advertised [after the French Revolution], was hidden and sublimated beneath a new value: *taste*, or better still, as the word is appropriately ambiguous, *distinction*."[63] A craftsperson could only produce a well-made garment, but an artist-cum-aristocrat – what we might now call a "taste-maker" – like Lucile could create an art object that would transfigure those who wore it, particularly dangerous because it was a commodity available for sale. As the *London Times* wrote in her 1935 obituary:

> Lady Duff-Gordon was not an ordinary dressmaker. She was a revelation in the art of causing ugly, ungainly, impossible women at least to look presentable. She could take in hand a human scarecrow and with a deft turn of hands, a mouth full of pins, a pull at a tape here and a pull there, transform the 'sitter' into a smiling, self-satisfied, happily dressed fashion-plate. Likewise she could, with the same few turns of the *prestidigiteteur*, transform the jaded lady of fashion, ordinarily

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[61] Kaplan and Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion,* 38-39.

[62] Howard Greer, "La Theatre et la mode a Paris" in *Theatre Magazine* 30 (1919).

[63] Roland Barthes, "Dandyism and Fashion," *The Language of Fashion*, trans. Andy Stafford (Berg: Oxford and New York, 2004), 66.

> smart and good-looking, into what the society reporters used to call 'a vision of loveliness,' who, like Keats' golden lilies, floated 'gleaming on the surface of the lake of wine.'[64]

The true "revelation" here is not so much that Lucile could make an ugly woman look fashionable (an established and non-threatening power of dressmakers) but that she could turn a "jaded" woman into Keats' lily, not merely beautiful but associated with purity and high culture; by extension, anyone with the money could acquire the qualities of class, virtue, and art that a Lucile dress carried. Reflecting on Lucile's career in 1930, *Vogue* editor Marie Beynon Ray referred to Duff-Gordon as a "Pygmalion" to her models, remaking and controlling every detail of their appearance.[65] This metaphor of the designer as (mythic, classical) sculptor, points toward the next turn accomplished by couture costumes – the transformation, not only of the designer into an artist, but of the garment into art.

At first, a study of Lucile's work seems to offer a clear difference between costume and clothing, located in the relationship between the garment-object and the wearer's interiority: a "stagey" garment is symbolically transparent, exposing the character's interiority to viewers, whereas a street garment does not do this. However, Lucile complicates this distinction by offering "performative" clothing to everyday consumers, showing how street clothing can change (perceptions of) the wearer's inner qualities. What first appears to be a distinction between stage and street clothing, based on their expression of the wearer's interiority, in fact collapses under the weighty authorship of the couture/costume designer. *Haute couture*, which should function as a

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[64] "Obituaries--Lucile," *Times of London*, 23 April 1935.

[65] Quoted in Bigham, *Lucile, her life by design,* 37. From *Mentor*, April 1930, 64

marker of elite status, in fact levels class boundaries through the power and authority of the designer or even the object itself, which makes subordinate "mannequins" of all clothing wearers.

Paul Poiret: costume as art object

While Lucile walked the fine line between "stagey" and real, aristocratic, or decent clothing, in Paris her rival Paul Poiret shifted the discussion by embracing the theatrical. Launched in 1903, Maison Poiret quickly became known for daring and whimsical designs influenced by Orientalism and ancient Greek dress. Poiret famously claimed to have "freed the bust and hobbled the legs,"[66] introducing slim, high-waisted styles that could be worn without a corset, but featuring hobble skirts that severely restricted the wearer's stride. Like Duff-Gordon, Poiret's autobiography reveals a life-long fascination with the theatre (according to his biographer Davis, as a boy "he spent the intermissions of the plays and concerts he attended sketching the outfits he observed on stage"[67]) and theatre costumes influenced his career at several key points. One of his first design assignments at Doucet was to create a cloak for the actress Gabrielle Réju ("Réjane") in *Zaza*: when it was a success onstage, he reported, "I was established, *chez* Doucet and in all Paris. I had stormed the ramparts on the shoulders of Réjane."[68] He also fell from Doucet's grace over an actress: "Bernhardt was less than divine to Poiret, demanding his

[66] Paul Poiret, *King of Fashion: The Autobiography of Paul Poiret*, trans. Stephen Haden Guest. (London: J. B. Lippincott Co, 1931), 36.

[67] Davis, *Couture Culture*, 24.

[68] Poiret, *King of Fashion,* 16.

dismissal [from Doucet] because of an overheard indiscreet remark."[69] After designing individual costumes or costume pieces for actresses while working for Doucet, Poiret began creating costumes in his own right in 1910; he worked steadily in theatre thereafter, averaging two to three shows (both in theatre and opera) per year until the late 1920s. The theatre seems to have attracted Poiret as an opportunity for unfettered imagination and design for its own sake: as Ernestine Carter puts it, "To Poiret, practicality was a dirty word."[70]

As his career developed, Poiret fully merged theatre and life, blurring the distinction between clothing and costume. He threw elaborate parties in the garden of his couture house for which all guests had to be costumed in a certain way -- which in practice meant in Maison Poiret creations. As he recounts in his autobiography (a passage almost completely in dialogue, itself like a play):

> The guests were received as in a theatre by a squad of old gentlemen in evening dress, who were no jokers, and most carefully scanned the arrivals.
>
> 'Excuse me, sir, you are in evening dress. This is a costume fête, and you cannot come in.'
>
> 'But, sir, my dress clothes are covered by an authentic Chinese mantel.'
>
> 'Monsieur, we are not in China, we are in Persia, and your costume has nothing to do with the setting. Therefore I cannot let you enter unless you change your costume.'
>
> 'At this time of night, it is impossible.'
>
> 'Excuse me, sir, if you will be good enough to go up to the first floor, a Persian costume can be provided for you, according to authentic documents; it will do you honour, and not disfigure the ensemble of the fête.'
>
> (I knew the carelessness of some of my friends, and I had taken measures to counteract it.)[71]

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[69] Ernestine Carter, *Magic Names of Fashion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1980), 27. Also recounted by Poiret, *King of Fashion,* 24-25.

[70] Carter, *Magic Names of Fashion*, 49.

[71] Poiret, *King of Fashion,* 98.

At this particular party, probably his most well-known, which he called "The Thousand-and-Second Night," Poiret acted as the sultan with his wife in a gilded cage, from which she escaped and fled from him during the evening. In retrospect Poiret apparently saw this as an instance of life imitating art, as a foreshadowing of their 1928 divorce: "Did we know, on that evening, that we were rehearsing the drama of our lives?"[72] Poiret also worked to dissolve the art/life distinction within the theatre itself: since Poiret's more *avant-garde* couture looks would not have been seen on most women in the theatre audience, he created a mirroring effect in onstage and offstage clothing by arranging for "his mannequins to wear his latest creations to the theatre."[73] For the opening of *Le Minaret* (1913), Poiret appeared in the audience with his wife "dressed to enter the scene," in the words of one critic.[74] Blurring the distinctions even more, Carter recounts that one of the most notorious costumes for *Le Minaret*, the lampshade tunic, "was designed as a costume for his wife to wear at the famous Thousand-and-Second Night fancy dress party… the costume was subsequently adapted for a play, *The Minaret*, and then by popular demand incorporated into his collections."[75] The lampshade tunic thus went from personal clothing to costume to commercial garment – from life to art to commodity.

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[72] Poiret, *King of Fashion,* 100.

[73] Troy, *Couture Culture*, 84.

[74] Lise-Léon Blum, "Le Goût au theatre" in *Gazette du Bon Ton* I, no.6 (April 1913): 188. Quoted and translated in Troy, *Couture Culture*, 209.

[75] Ernestine Carter, *Magic Names of Fashion*, 49-50.

While Poiret's designs were subject to the same kinds of "theatrical" critiques as Lucile,[76] Poiret was able to change the context in which fashion and costume design were read, perhaps more successfully than any other couturier of the period. Poiret perfected Worth's aspirations to artistic self-fashioning, cultivating a social circle of haute bohemia, dressing in flowing robes, and participating in Modern art. In 1908, Poiret commissioned an extremely successful limited edition album of his fashion designs sketched by Paul Iribe, an illustrator and artist associated with the new trends in fine art.[77] A glossy, expensive luxury item, *Les robes de Paul Poiret racontée par Paul Iribe* essentially turned advertising (fashion plates) into high art. Only 250 copies were made, using *pochior* printing[78] on Holland paper; some were sold for the high price of 40 francs each and some "were distributed without charge to a select few (including the Queen of England), solidifying Poiret's alliance with his targeted clientele and distinguishing him from the couture competition."[79]

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[76] Sofia Gnoli writes that Poiret was "accused by many of his colleagues… of being more a costumer than a couturier" ("accusato da molti suoi colleghi…di essere più un costumista che un couturier"). Sofia Gnoli, *Moda e Teatro* (Roma: Meltemi editore, 2008), 21.

[77] Besides the press coverage, success can be judged from the fact that Poiret repeated this format in expanded form in 1911, commissioning an album from George Lepape in a run of 1000. See Davis, *Couture Culture,* 46.

[78] Popular with the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements, especially in Paris, *pochior* is a process of stencil printing and then adding color by hand, usually either watercolor or opaque gouache. It is extremely labor intensive, because of the individual hand work necessary for each copy; however, the colors produced are exceptionally crisp and vibrant. See Davis, *Couture Culture,* 46. This book was a fairly early use of *pochior* printing, which had its heyday in the advertising and art illustration of the 1920s; Gordon Ray sees *Les robes de Paul Poiret* as influential in both medium and style, "the first landmark in the high fashion tradition which led to Art Deco illustration." Gordon N. Ray, "The Art Deco Book in France: the 1985 Lyell Lectures," ed. G. Thomas Tansell, in *Studies in Bibliography* 55 (2002), 29.

[79] Davis, *Couture Culture,* 44.

By crediting both Poiret and Iribe in the title, the work emphasized their artistic authorship, implying that clothing could be *racontée* or "told" as if it carried narrative meaning. Interestingly, there are no captions or text whatsoever accompanying the plates (eleven in all) – this "telling" is entirely visual. The illustrations are artistically stylized in a way that dress images in journalism or catalogue marketing were not at this time, filtering them through Iribe's distinctive style rather than striving for descriptive accuracy. Commenting generally on the fashion illustration tradition launched by this book, Gordon Ray notes that the plates "are not only records of the dress of the time but also fresh and attractive compositions in themselves. Sometimes they have a dramatic element as well."[80] He is probably thinking of the way in which "in lieu of showing models in the stiff poses that had become standard fashion plate fare, Iribe instead grouped them standing in expressive combinations suggesting action, conversation, or introspection, thus promoting clothing as well as a more relaxed and natural attitude for the new century."[81] Perhaps with tongue in cheek, Iribe emphasizes the artistic nature of these illustrations by showing fine-art paintings on the wall behind the figures in four plates; another two feature mirrors. One further visual detail points out the book's status as art: the plate on the title page is a nude. While she has a hair style similar to the other plates, the figure displays no clothing; this ties the work to the Western art tradition of

[80] Ray, "The Art Deco Book in France," 30.

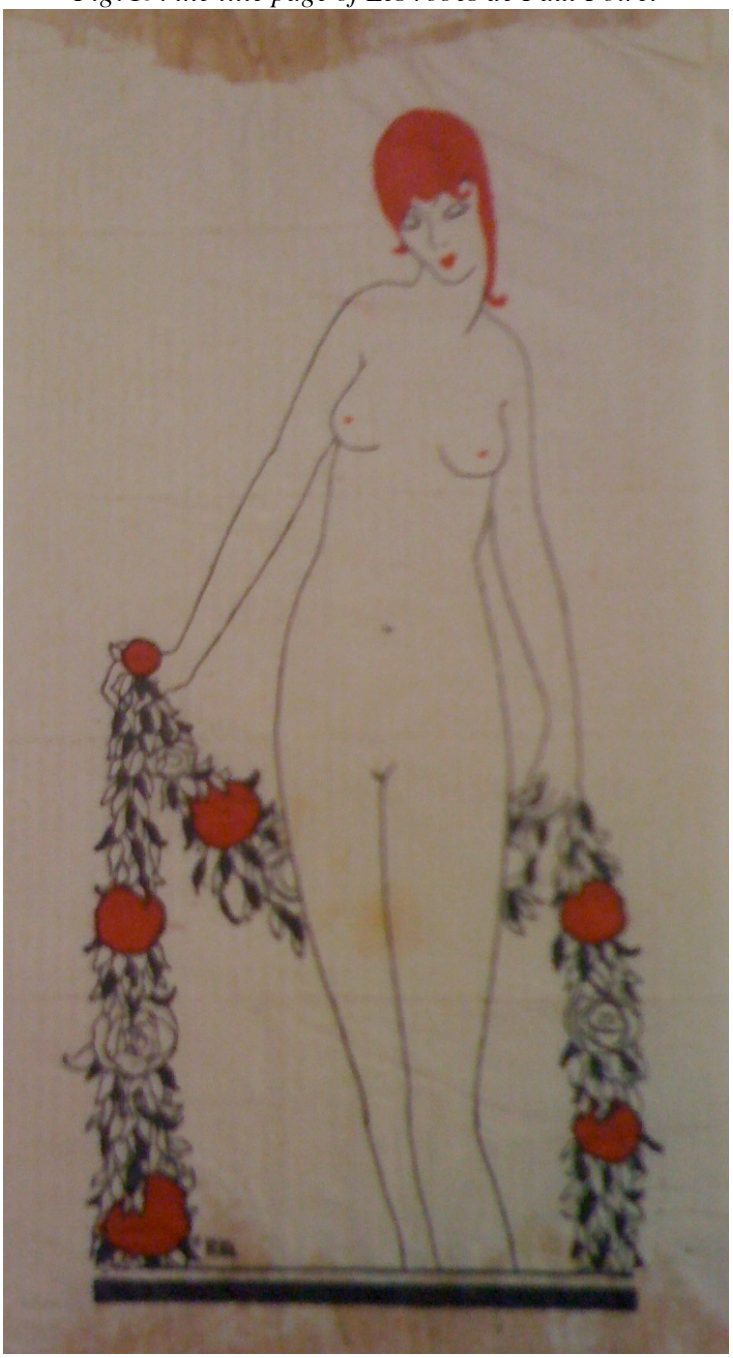
[81] Davis, *Couture Culture,* 45.

Fig.18: a plate from Les robes de Paul Poiret

nudes in similar contraposto poses. This choice also isolates the clothing, which perhaps tells its own story, from the one page of the book containing written text (the title, place and date of publication are listed on this page, above and below the figure, and the number of the edition and pricing appears on the back of this page). Perhaps clothing

would be redundant here, as we are already told in writing that we will see "Les robes de Paul Poiret, racontée par Paul Iribe."[82]

Fig. 19: the title page of Les robes de Paul Poiret



[82] For this close reading I have relied on the copy in the Spencer Collection of the New York Public Library: *Les robes de Paul Poiret, racontée par Paul Iribe* (Paris: Société Général d'Impression, 1908). Unfortunately, the title page has some water damage.

In 1911, this approach to clothing design as art came to fruition when Poiret's costume designs for *Nabuchodonosor* "were exhibited at the Salon d'Automne, where, in effect, they assumed the status of works of art."[83] Jacques Rouché of the Théâtre des Arts commissioned Poiret to create all the costumes – male and female – for this new play by Maurice de Faramond; according to Sophia Gnoli, this was his first opportunity to create a complete costume design.[84] Poiret created a fantasy of ancient Abyssinia "of a magnificence difficult to imagine,"[85] drawing on the Orientalism in which he was already interested in 1908, made extremely popular in Paris after 1909 by the Ballets Russes. Although the play itself was panned for its clumsy, pretentious verse, critics were wild about the design, of which the costumes were an integral part. Contemporary A.E. Marty remembered that "When, in the midst of the green, yellows and oranges, de Max [the actor playing Nabuchodonosor] entered, covered in a coat of somber purple, all the artists [in the audience] trembled in admiration."[86] Critics praised the design for its harmony and Poiret in particular for his color schemes: "M. Poiret has the inventive spirit. He is a colorist and an artist."[87] The artistic handling of the extras was also remarked upon: "The crowd (if one can call a wise grouping of rarefied figures a 'crowd') is assembled with a curious and delicate care, and the costumes seem to be part of the

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[83] Troy, *Couture Culture,* 113.

[84] Gnoli, *Moda e Teatro,* 31: "Poiret ebbe la sua prima occasione come costumista a tutti gli effetti nel 1911, quando … Jacques Rouché si rivolse a lui per la realizzazione dei costumi della pièce di Maurice de Faramond, Nabuchodonoso."

[85] Léon Moussinac, *La décoration théâtrale* (Paris: F. Rieder et cie, 1922), 75. ("Quant aux costumes imaginés par Paul Poiret, ils étaient d'une magnificence difficilement imaginable.")

[86] Quoted in Troy, *Couture Culture,* 113. Her translation.

[87] Henri de Régnier, "Revue dramatique" in *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, (Paris) 1911, v.1. ("M. Poiret a l'esprit inventif. C'est un coloriste et un artiste.")

Fig. 20: Nabuchodonosor production still (detail) from The Sketch, *12 April 1911*

wall paintings and tapestries, so we get a sort of living frescoes."[88] Gustave Lanson's article in *Le Grand Revue* provides a good summary of the critical reaction: "The work is mounted, it is not too much to say, marvelously... the same barbaric grandeur in the brilliance of the wall decoration, in the sumptuous costumes, in the tumultuous movement … It would be impossible to compose…a more beautiful and more powerfull image of the life of the ancient Asian empires…. decor, thus understood, is poetry."[89]

Later in 1911 Poiret adapted some of the looks from *Nabuchodonosor* into his fashion collection for that year, which he called *style sultane*. Davis writes that "Poiret's *style sultane* collection… falling somewhere between costume and dress, represented a renegotiation of the relationship between art and fashion."[90] This collection "attracted the attention of critic Paul Cornu, the librarian at the Parisian Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, who made Poiret and his new look the focus of an article published in the April 1911 issue of the institution's premier publication, *Art et Décoration*… posit[ing] Poiret as the augur of a new era in which dress would be considered a decorative art."[91]

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[88] "Théatre des Arts" [no byline; ed. Edmond Stoullig] in *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique*, (Paris) no. 37 (1911). ["La foule (si l'on peut appeler 'foule' un groupement savant de figuration raréfiée) est assemblée avec un soin curieux et délicat, et les costumes semblent faire partie intégrante des peintures murales et des tapisseries, si bien qu'on obtient de la sorte des fresques vivantes."]

[89] Gustave Lanson, "La Vie Théatrale" in *Le Grand Revue* [Paris] 65 (1911). ("L'ouvrage est monté, ce n'est pas trop dire, merveilleusement… même grandeur barbare dans l'éclat de la decoration murale, dans la somptuosité des costumes, dans le mouvement tumultueux .. L'archéologie a fourni les materiaux et les directions: elle a conseillé et servi, non opprimé l'artiste… Il était impossible de composer… une image plus belle et plus puisssante de la vie des anciene empires de l'Asie… le décor, ainsi compris, est poésie.")

[90] Davis, *Couture Culture,* 34.

Noting Poiret's frequent collaboration with interior designers and visual artists, Cornu "likened Poiret's approach to the unified expressiveness known in the arts as the *Gesamtkunstwerk*."[92]

Positive reviews such as these, focusing on the artistic content of Poiret's work, must have influenced the prestigious Salon d'Automne in chosing to exhibit "models, drawings, costumes and jewelry executed for the plays of the season 1911 and 1912 in the Théâtre des Arts."[93] Salon President Frantz Jourdain records this as part of an effort to exibit "all the new attempts [in art]"[94] – reflecting the mission of the Salon d'Automne to exhibit new and innovative work.[95] While the Salon d'Automne had previously exhibited fashion sketches and illustrations (including plates from *Les robes de Paul Poiret* in 1909[96]) this seems to have been the first time that actual garments appeared in a gallery setting. Although in some ways fashion design had more pretentions to high art at this time than theatre costume, it was in the form of theatre costumes that clothing objects were first exhibited as art. (Street fashions from Poiret's couture lines were not exhibited

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[91] Davis, *Couture Culture,* 34.

[92] Davis, *Couture Culture,* 34.

[93] *Salon d'Automne,* par Frantz Joudain avec la collaboration de Robert Rey. (Paris: Les Arts et le Livre, 1926) 72. (This book is a record of the salon written by its first president, Joudain.)

[94] Joudain, 72. ("Le Salon d'Automne offer ses salles à toutes les tentatives nouvelles. Il expose, cette année-la, les maquettes, les dessins, les costumes et les bijoux exécutés pour les pièces représentées pendant la saison 1911 et 1912 au Théâtre des Arts.")

[95] The Salon d'Automne was founded in 1903 by younger artists unhappy with the conservative taste of the Paris Salon. By 1911 it enjoyed high status as a presentor of serious fine art, associated with important early-twentieth-century developments such as Fauvism and Cubism. Poiret's work followed exhibitions including Renoir, Matisse, Manet, Cezanne, Rodin, and Duchamp, to name only a few.

[96] Davis, *Couture Culture,* 46.

at the Salon d'Automne or in other galleries until later.[97]) I suggest that it is precisely the *Nabuchodonosor* costumes' origin in the theatre that made them the first couture pieces to achieve this artistic transfiguration. The stage production, by providing a public "ritual function" for these garments, legitimated them as original art objects.

Conclusion

The work of early-twentieth-century fashion designers for the stage produces a series of binaries – art/craft, clothing/costume, real/fictional, original/copy – which turn out to be ever-collapsing in on themselves. For a limited time at the turn of the century, regular clothes had a theatricality that meant they were closer on the continuum to costume: Troy calls this quality "the theatrical core of prewar fashion, the way in which it mimicked contemporary theatre as spectacle by constructing women to be seen – often at the theatre, even as they were in the act of seeing."[98] The couture costume could easily exist at this moment as a synthesis object, straddling the categories of art/craft and real/representation. Costumes gained status as art objects, which could be sealed off from commerce in the gallery or museum; this association with high art opened the door, in turn, to a new kind of signification or reading of these objects, which is explored in the next chapter. In addition, the new model of couture design established an authority for a designer of clothing that helped to develop a similar status for the theatrical costume designer, separating the art of design from the craft of sewing. Taken together, Lucile and Poiret accomplish a double and mutually-constitutive transformation through their

[97] Jourdain records that Poiret's fashion pieces were also exhibited in the Salons of 1919, 1920, and 1920. There was at least one exhibit of Poiret's fashion at his own Galerie Barbazanges, in 1914.

[98] Troy, *Couture Culture,* 209.

engagements with theatre: the transformation of the customer into a character, and the transformation of the costume into art. The symbiotic relationship between theatre and fashion in this period, I argue, goes much further than mutual commercial interests or advertisement: they co-construct an "aura" or artistic authority around the garment, whether on or off stage.

Annie Holt
Chapter 4

Sartorial Symbols:
fine artists and costume design

Many early theatre historians identify two different schools of scenography in the early twentieth century, focusing on their differences in dimensionality: the Ballets Russes designers, made up almost exclusively of painters, often considered "the gorgeous sunset of scene-painting"[1] in the two-dimensional baroque tradition typified by the painted canvas backdrop, versus the new "plastic" school of Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig, which used three-dimensional objects such as architectural columns or stairs. If we shift the focus from set design to costume design, however, the Ballets Russes and Edward Gordon Craig are not actually as far apart as they seem; their dimensional differences are leveled by the presence of a human body within the design. Designers of both schools develop two kinds of stage garments which reshape costumes vis-à-vis the performing body: either they foster a perceived fusion between the performing body and the garment (as in a leotard), or they create what I would like to call "kinetic" costumes, in which pieces of the garment are detached or semi-detached from the body, moving independently when in motion. This chapter examines ways in which costumes by Craig are similar to those of Ballets Russes designers Leon Bakst and Pablo Picasso, arguing that all three of these designers use both flat and plastic (three-dimensional) elements; the play between these two modalities is what gives these costumes their style, meaning, and interest. These complex relationships between body

[1] James Laver, "Continental Designers in the Theatre," in *Design in the Theatre,* ed. Geoffrey Holme (London: Waterlow and Sons Limited, 1927), 20.

and garment, and between surface and depth, engage questions of costumes' "speaking" or legibility onstage, positing an expanded expressive potential for costume design. Together, Craig, Bakst and Picasso help to develop costume design from Symbolist roots towards the concerns of New Stagecraft.

Background and contexts: painters, style, and symbolism

As art historian Henning Rischbieter writes, at the turn of century, "the intimidating, priestly sounding phrase 'theatre of style' was widely current."[2] Craig and the Ballets Russes designers were marked by a bold, non-realistic quality that many contemporary viewers labeled "stylization." In 1922, Sheldon Cheney defined this term as "the creative quality that an artist puts into a production as a revelation of his own individual vision."[3] Cheney's use of the word "artist" rather the designer or director is key: the designers for the Ballets Russes were virtually all fine-art painters and/or sculptors, who brought the concerns of early-twentieth-century visual art into stage design, including an interest in the abstract, impressionistic, interior perspective of the artist-designer. The stylized "individual vision" of the Ballet Russes costume designs turns in on itself, investigating bodies, theatre conventions, national origins, and finally the designers' own artistic expression. As Parisian critic André Marty put it in *Comoedia Illustré* in 1909, the visual elements of the Ballet Russes "never cease to be themselves, but become themselves in a way that is larger and more alive."[4] This expressive,

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[2] Henning Rischbieter (editor), *Art and the stage in the 20th century*, trans. Michael Bullock (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 10.

[3] Sheldon Cheney, "The Painter in the Theatre," *Theatre Arts Magazine* [Detroit] 6 (1922), 197.

[4] Quoted and translated in Mary E. Davis, *Ballets Russes Style: Diaghilev' Dancers and Paris*

heightened kind of design, strongly influenced by twentieth-century visual art, is the direct precursor to the twenty-first-century conception of costume design as conveying a designer's interpretation of the text.

Both "stylization" and the use of painters as stage designers had roots in French Symbolist theatre: in Paris, avant-garde and specifically Symbolist theatres like Théâtre de l'Oeuvre began using painters to create stylized programs for their plays at the very end of the nineteenth century.[5] Theatrical Symbolism was marked by a contradiction: a distaste for materiality coupled with the belief that certain combinations of sounds and images could provide access to a higher realm. The right kind of stage production was in fact enormously important to Symbolists, but only as a gateway to higher non-material meaning: paradoxically, Symbolists were anti-theatricalists who paid intense attention to the physical manifestations of theatre. Symbolists often tried to keep stagings close to static tableaux of paintings (an idea advocated by Paul Fort at the Théâtre d'Art); non-naturalist painters, especially from the Nabi group, followers of Gauguin, were engaged to provide simplified, suggestive, or "Primitive" production design.[6] Historian Frantisek Deak emphasizes the centrality of fine artists to this movement: "symbolist theatre was invented by poets in collaboration with painters and not by theatrical directors."[7] Costume design was a thorny issue, as Symbolists believed that the material body of the actor destroyed the semiotic program of the performance: "the actor-as-sign is a sign of

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Fashion (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 39-40.

[5] Patricia Eckert Boyer, *Artists and the Avant-Guard Theatre in Paris, 1887-1900* (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1998), 13-15.

[6] Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theatre: the formation of an avant-garde* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 142.

[7] Deak, *Symbolist Theatre,* 11.

the recreated reality, and at the same time is, as a man, a sign belonging to another reality… communicating and at the same time hindering the perception of the recreated life."[8] This concern about the incongruent body was reiterated and developed by Edward Gordon Craig (especially in his theory of the Übermarionette), who seems to have viewed this as a central problem with the costume design of the Ballets Russes.

Symbolists and Naturalists believed that larger truths could be perceived via particular exterior images – that costumes could be looked *through* to read information on the other side – if they were not contaminated by the material body. Artistic movements like Dada and Surrealism, however, took a slightly different approach towards the surface of the costume or image: as costume theorist Aoife Monks writes, "The audience's gaze is imagined to bounce off the object somehow, deflected towards metaphysical insight… Depth is accessed through surfaces that divert the audience's attention towards the recognition of eternal truths."[9] The Ballets Russes designers went one step further in this reconsideration of surface and depth: influenced by Futurism's emphasis on the everyday object as artistic or profound, they experimented with the significance of the surface itself, sometimes utilizing the skin or the material of the costume as a literal writing surface. Drawing on artistic movements like Impressionism and Expressionism, they projected their own interior depths onto the surfaces of the stage.

Richard Wagner's theories of artistic unity also contributed to the rise of painters working onstage, especially through his influence on French Symbolism. This Wagnerian heritage was enthusiastically taken up by the Ballets Russes producers, who

[8] Deak, *Symbolist Theatre,* 108.

[9] Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 66.

believed ballet to be the ideal vehicle for artistic synthesis. Of course, drawing on Wagner was also a smart marketing decision because of his popularity in early-twentieth-century Paris: "Positioning themselves as the heirs to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* dream was vital to Diaghilev and his crew: it allowed them to attract to their theatre the crème de la crème of the Parisian intellectual and artistic elite, most of them acknowledged acolytes of the Bayreuth Master."[10] The Ballets Russes artists were able to build upon Wagner's abstract, ambiguous, or "artistically true" designs (discussed in chapter one), drawing on dance to bring a new perspective to his problem of the performing body.

While this focus on the artistic vision of the designer is clearly influenced by trends in fine art, the genre of ballet itself may also partially explain why the Ballets Russes costume designs were able to break free of realism so effectively. In a 1936 article, Ballets Russes designer Alexandre Benois laid out the difference between décor in ballet versus in theatre or opera: "In plays it is the text that dominates; ballet is built upon poetry and music, and enacted on a plane that bears but a vague relation to the material world" and thus can be more abstract.[11] Ballet costume already had a history of abstraction or ritualization, in the ballerina's white tulle "ballet skirt" (or tutu) popularized by Marie Taglioni's 1832 *La Sylphide* costume; "the ballet costume that conquered the world" had become almost a uniform for dancers by 1900.[12] Male dancers

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[10] Olga Haldey, *Mamontov's Private Opera: the search for Modernism in Russian Theatre* (Bloomington ID: Indiana University Press, 2010), 107.

[11] Alexandre Benois, "The Décor and Costume," trans. S.J. Simon, in *Footnotes to the Ballet: a book for balletomanes*, ed. Caryl Brahms (New York: H. Holt, 1936), 180-181.

[12] Mary Cargill, "Dance Costumes in the Western Performance Tradition," *Documenting: Costume Design,* ed. Friedland, Nancy E. (New York: Theatre Library Association, 2010), 5. See

were similarly regimented and divorced from character. Michel Fokine, the first Ballets Russes choreographer, expressed his dissatisfaction with the ritualized classical ballet costume and the fixed persona of the dancer, remembering the discrepancy he experienced as a young dancer at the Imperial Ballet between character (or "mime") roles, which were costumed historically, and lead ballet parts: "when I played a mime role, I represented an authentic image of the period. But when I danced a classic part, I portrayed a leading dancer - outside the confines of place or time, with marcelled hair, pink cheeks, and ballet tights."[13] Because ballet costume was already free from some of the constraints of historical realism or fashion design which predominated in theatre and opera, it proved an open field for more creative costume design.

In his 1936 article quoted above, Benois also argued that "It is essential in ballet to differentiate between theory of décor and theory of costume… Décor is the 'background' in front of which something is performed – that something being nearly always detached from it. Costume, on the other hand, takes a part in the performance itself."[14] Michelle Potter argues that Leon Bakst's designs for the Ballets Russes reveal "his interest in what happened to the costumes when worn… Bakst indicated an interest in developing the costume as a functional item of dance, an item that was capable of extending the range of the body's movement in space."[15] Movement and design were so closely aligned, in fact, that painter-designers were sometimes seen as influencing

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also Cyril W. Beaumont, *Ballet Design Past and Present* (London: Wazell, Watson and Viney, Ltd., 1946), and Mary Clarke and Clement Crisp, *Design for Ballet* (London: Studio Vista, 1978).

[13] From Fokine's *Memoirs* (1961), quoted in Clark and Crisp, *Design for Ballet,* 105.

[14] Benois, "The Décor and Costume," 177.

[15] Michelle Potter, "Designed for Dance: the Costumes of Léon Bakst and the Art of Isadora Duncan," *Dance Chronicle* 13:2 (1990): 155.

choreography itself: in 1913, a critic believed that the choreography of *Jeux* was dictated by the design, resulting in movements that "twisted [dancer Tamara] Karsavina's precious limbs in the name of Matisse, Mezinger, and Picasso."[16] (Many of the company's dancers and choreographers did report having to adjust movement to accommodate costumes, with varying degrees of irritation.[17]) Since the Ballets Russes artists usually designed both the set (often consisting of only a painted backdrop) and costumes, their interest in motion and its relation to costume became an integral part of the overall stage picture: as Rischbieter writes, in these designs, "the relationship between decor and costume was changed… the costumes became a part – a moving part – of the décor."[18]

Edward Gordon Craig also held movement – or as he sometimes called it, action – as one of the primary elements of theatre art. Biographer Christopher Innes points out that this opinion was influenced by dance, via Craig's long-standing liaison with Isadora Duncan: "For Craig, perfect movement created a mystical union with the universal rhythms of nature in such a way as to directly express the soul… the model for this metaphysic of movement was Isadora Duncan."[19] Craig's work focused less on text: his

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[16] Quoted in Rischbieter, *Art and the stage in the 20th century*, 12.

[17] See for example various dancers' comments about *Le Sacre du Printemps* and *Carnaval*, quoted in Sarah Woodcock, "Ballets Russes Costumes and the Art of Design," in *The Ballets Russes and the Art of Design,* eds. Alston Purvis, Peter Rand, and Anna Winestein (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2009), 45. See also W. A. Propert's dislike of the stiff costumes of *Tricorne*: "dresses that never seemed to move with the wearers or answer the changing curves of their bodies, that looked as if they were cut in cardboard," W.A. Propert, *The Russian Ballet in Western Europe, 1909-1920* (New York: John Lane Co, 1921), 55.

[18] Rischbieter, *Art and the stage in the 20th century,* 12.

[19] Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 114.

aim was "a form of drama created solely from the physical element of theatrical presentation."[20]

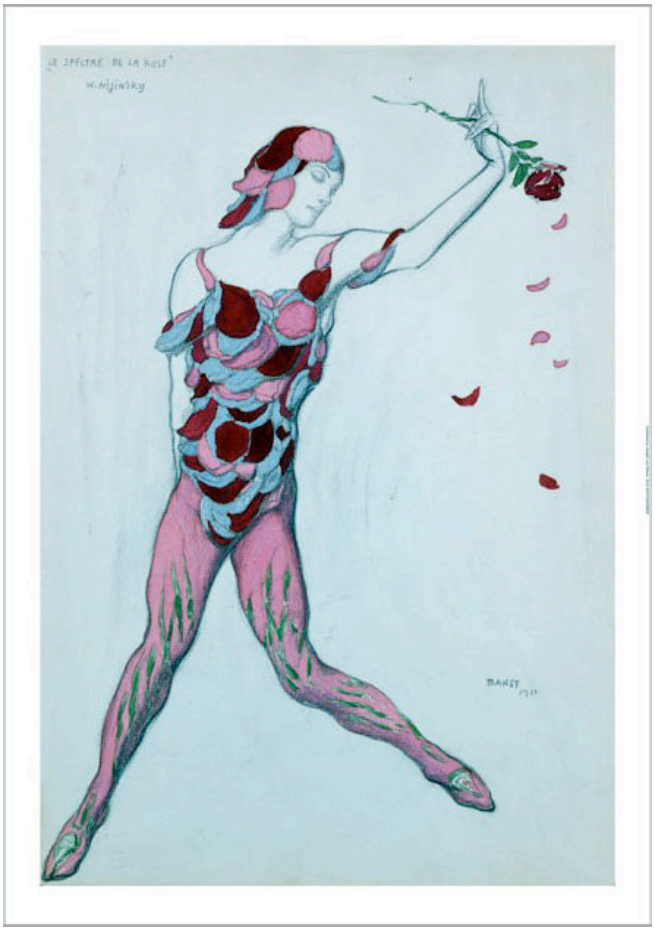

Fig. 21: Bakst's sketch for Le Spectre de la Rose

Leon Bakst

In 1911, Leon Bakst designed a ballet called *Le Spectre de la Rose*, in which star danseur Vaslav Nijinsky's costume featured many petals; some of these petals fell off nearly every night, and Nijinsky's enterprising dresser sold these petals to the danseur's

[20] Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig,* 129.

adoring fans.[21] This is sometimes explained as poor execution by the costume house, but it may have been the intended effect – Bakst's costume sketch features petals falling off in a graceful trail. Bakst's costume for Nijinsky in *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1912), continued this fusing of costume with body: Nijinsky's wife Romola recalled that the Faun costume "was painted by Bakst in a coffee colour with big brown spots, which were disposed in such a manner, continuing on to the bare arms and hands, to give the impression it was the skin of a Faun itself, and the difference between flesh and costume could not be discovered… one could not define where the human ended and the animal began."[22] Penny Farfan comments that "This confusion of the boundary between body and costume is analogous to the persistent confusion of artist and character in both popular and critical discourse on Nijinsky"[23]; while the effect is certainly heightened by Nijinsky's star persona, it also indicates Bakst's demonstrated interest in costume as a part of a body in movement.

Faune contains perhaps one of the most well-known "kinetic" costume pieces in western theatre history: in the scandalous last moment of the ballet, the faun takes a scarf left behind by the lead nymph, caresses it, and lowers his body onto it with a movement suggesting masturbation. A studio photo shows Nijinsky carrying the scarf in two outstretched arms, as if performing a *pas-de-deux* with the fabric; many critics have

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[21] "The 20th-Century Ballet Revolution," Victoria and Albert Museum website, last accessed Nov. 5, 2012, http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/20th-century-revolution/

[22] Quoted in Penny Farfan, "Man as Beast: Nijinsky's Faun," *South Central Review*, 25:1 (Spring 2008): 85.

[23] Farfan, "Man as Beast: Nijinsky's Faun," 85.

Fig. 22: Nijinsky as the Faun in a staged photo

identified the end of the ballet with fetishism. Garafola sees the ending as a turn away from female sexuality: "The scarf that he hugs to himself and into which, in the ballets' last spasmodic movement, he spills his seed, is not, however merely a stand-in for its absent owner. Equally it symbolizes his triumph over the snares of Woman, his

resistance to the temptation of her flesh."[24] Farfan argues that "the nymph's scarf might also be said to function as a signifier of the female body's dispensability to male sexuality, however, so that the Faun's interaction with the scarf is in effect an encapsulation of the narrative that the ballet has already staged."[25] The costume, however, is not indispensable to the faun's sexuality – the faun lets the nymph escape because he has her costume, which offers as much (or more) pleasure than her body; going even further, the scarf may actually be more important or pleasurable than the nymph herself, in fact the most important thing in the ballet other than the faun.

Bearing out this interpretation, Bakst's sketch for the faun, which was also used as the ballet's program cover, depicts the faun *and the scarf*. Taken together, the faun sketch and the end of the ballet indicate the importance of costumes to the Ballets Russes; the scarf is not only a fetishistic object within the ballet, taking on a life or significance of its own detached from the performing body, but Bakst's costumes in general became fetishized as a key element of the production, spilling over into fashion trends and interior design. These costumes exist to give pleasure – non-reproductive, non-narrative and not historically accurate – as *l'art pour l'art*.

Faune also combined this kinetic costume with its opposite, static or flat costume. The faun costume sketch is strikingly different in style from the sketches of the nymphs – the faun is shown in a twisted posture which gives depth to the figure, surrounded by curving lines, reminiscent of the sensuous sketches for Bakst's previous two ballets,

[24] Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes,* 57.

[25] Farfan, "Man as Beast: Nijinsky's Faun," 82.

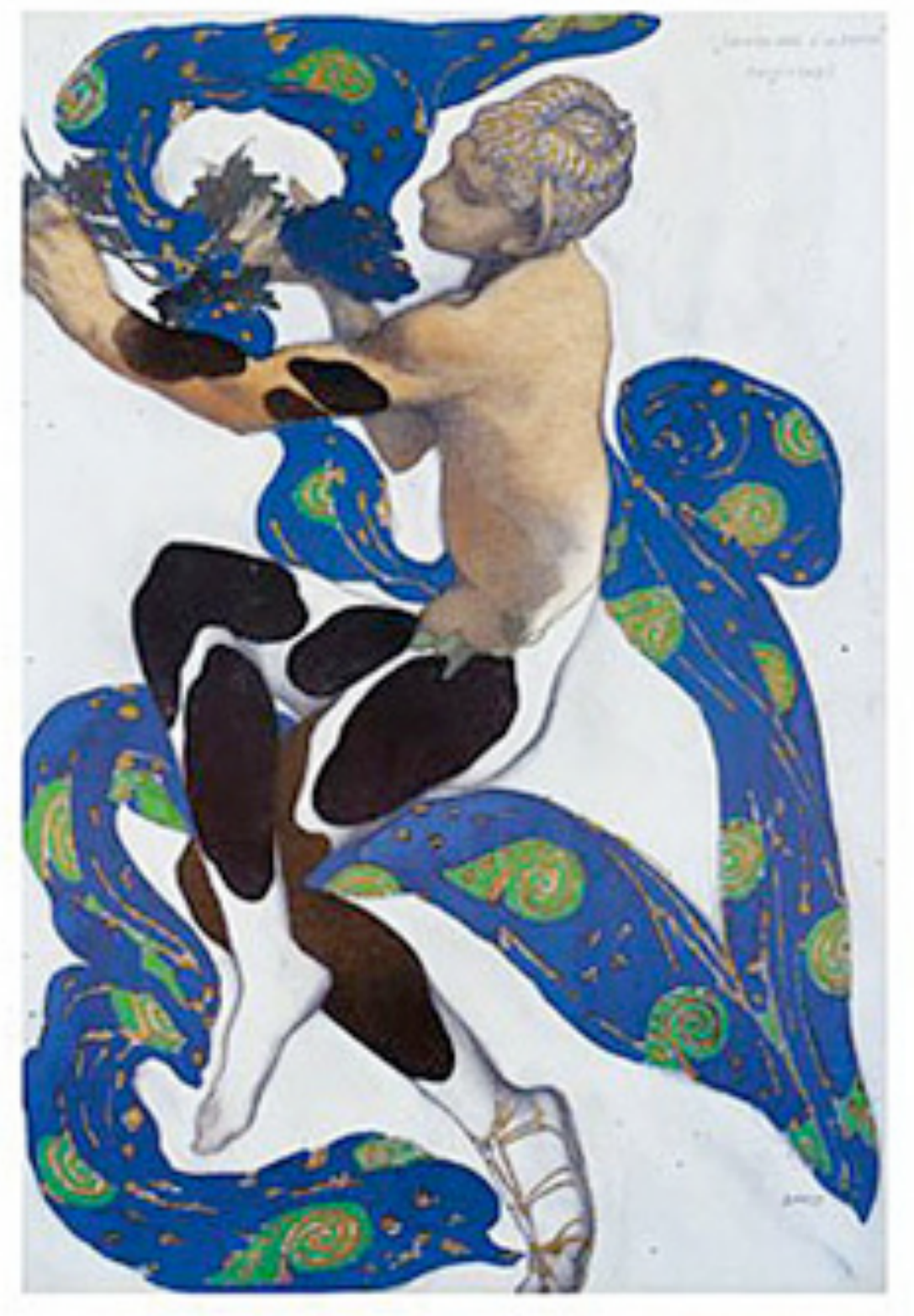

Fig. 23: Bakst's sketch of the Faun, also the ballet program's cover

Fig. 24: a production still showing the Faune *costumes in front of the backdrop*

Cléopatre and *Schéhérazade*.. The nymphs, however, are sketched in a style evoking bas-relief – their poses are strikingly two-dimensional. While the faun is shaded to show dimensionality, the nymphs are drawn in a primitivist style, without shadow. Contemporary accounts suggest that this difference is related to movement – the sketches' artistic styles mirrored the different ways the faun and nymphs moved in the ballet. The nymphs remained in flat poses, as if walking along a line laid down at the back of the stage; the faun, however, broke this two-dimensional conceit, using varying depths of stage space. Russian critic Anatolii Lunacharskii complained that "the naturalistic half-goat sufficiently differs from the angular marble women… the nymphs 'walk along a rope' but the faun several times goes off to center stage."[26] The costume sketches clearly reflect these differences in choreography, and may even have suggested

[26] From his article 'Russkie i nemetskie noveshestva,' in *Teatr i iskusstvo* 29 (1912), translated and quoted in Stanley J. Rabinowitz, "From the Other Shore: Russian Comment on Diaghilev's Ballets Russes" in *Dance Research* 27:1 (May 2009): 10.

them: the two-dimensional movement may have been Bakst's idea, or at least co-created by him with Diaghilev.[27]

Figs. 25 and 26: Bakst's sketches for two of the nymphs

Garafola writes that "Costume unfettered the body no less than choreography. Like Fokine, Bakst freed the back and midriff…legs were doubly naked for in exotic and 'Greek' ballets, the dancers often performed without tights" and that "in *Faune* and *Jeux*, Nijinsky formed the body anew."[28] The new body and its new movement were

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[27] Arnold Haskell argues Bakst created this movement, writing that Diaghilev and Bakst "resolved to make of the ballet a moving bas-relief, all in profile, a ballet with no dancing but only movement and plastic attitude – the inspiration for all this being solely Bakst's." (Quoted in Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes,* 52.) Garafola sees this account as biased, suggesting that Nijinsky was actually responsible for more of this concept; regardless of who had the initial idea, however, Bakst was involved in the creation of the ballet at the concept level, and laid out its core movement in his costume designs. Garafola suggested the term "co-created" in a personal conversation of 3/19/13.

[28] Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes,* 38, 69.

intimately tied to the design, and in *Faune*, were marked by two-dimensionality. While this flatness in set design could be seen as traditional, in costume design and movement, however, it was strikingly new. Garafola believes that Bakst was influenced by Meyerhold (they worked together twice, in 1906 and 1908) and argues that "What *Faune* did was transpose to the dance stage the principles of Meyerhold's 'static theatre.'"[29] It is apparent that Bakst thought about the issue of dimensionality carefully, crafting the set/costume/body image as one.

Edward Gordon Craig

Like Bakst, Craig experimented with kinetic costume effects early in his career, in two operas at the turn of the century. *Dido and Aeneas* (1900) utilized very large pieces of uncut cloth wrapped around the chorus as exaggerated shawls; this drapery was worn in different ways and manipulated into different shapes by the performers. *Acis and Galatea* (1901) featured costumes with long flowing strips of fabric, which changed the apparent color and shape of the garment when the actor moved.

Craig also experimented with "flat" costumes, along the lines of Bakst's nymphs, perhaps most famously in his designs for the 1912 Moscow Art Theatre *Hamlet*. Craig used an unusual medium, which already contained different dimensions, from the beginning of the design process: Craig primarily communicated his ideas to the Moscow team through his "black figures." These were, first, cardboard cut-outs he made for his

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[29] Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes,* 54.

Fig. 27: Dido and Aeneas (1900)

Fig. 28: Acis and Galatea (1901)

small model stage, and later woodcuts, inked to provide impressions; they became well-known as the illustrations to the Cranach Press edition of Hamlet, published in 1928.[30] As Jennifer Buckley argues, the black figures already present a dimensional tension, in the difference between the "three-dimensional 'actors' [meaning the original cut-outs]

[30] Because the Cranach *Hamlet* edition was published sixteen years after the production, there has been much scholarly discussion about whether the black figures correspond to Craig's actual designs for the MAT *Hamlet*. Most conclude that the black figures do represent Craig's intentions as a designer before the 1912 production, and in the absence of more of his watercolor sketches, the black figures are the best available documentation of Craig's wishes. Many of the watercolor sketchs are either lost or never existed – a point of dispute between Craig and Stanislavski, detailed in Laurence Senelick, *Gordon Craig's Moscow* Hamlet*: A Reconstruction* (London: Greenwood Press, 1982), 147. Besides Senelick, see also Brian Arnott, *Edward Gordon Craig and Hamlet* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975); Marjorie Garber, "A Tale of Three Hamlets or Repetition and Revenge," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 61:1 (Spring 2010); 28-55, and Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: a visual history of twentieth-century performance* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), espec. 54-55.

and as two-dimensional prints."[31] It was difficult for the MAT staff to figure out how to translate these rough images into actual garments, and this production had a complicated and difficult design process; by the time it got to performance, another designer was given partial credit in the program (along with Craig) for the costumes,[32] and some actors were even claiming to have designed their own garments.[33] After seeing the final dress rehearsals, Craig complained about the execution of his costume designs, but he also had a chance to make some corrections: the week before opening, "he carved a medallion for Kachalov to wear [as Hamlet] and fashioned a headdress to suit his ideas."[34] Even with so many designers involved, the costumes do show a resemblance to Craig's black figures, exhibiting a tension between two- and three-dimensionality similar to the designs of the Ballets Russes.

One of the most iconic costumes is Hamlet's tunic. While Lawrence Senelick attributes this costume to one of the artists called in to assist (Dobuzhinsky), in fact the basic idea for the costume appears in Craig's designs as early as 1904.[35] Even more significantly, Craig's black figure for Hamlet with the daemon of death[36] shows Hamlet

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[31] Buckley, "Symbols in Silence: Edward Gordon Craig and the Engraving of Wordless Drama," *Theatre Survey* 54:2 (May 2013), 215.

[32] Quoted in Senelick, *Gordon Craig's Moscow* Hamlet, 154. From sources currently available in English, it is unclear when Sapunov became involved, and whether Dobuzhinsky also had a hand in the finished product or not.

[33] Senelick *Gordon Craig's Moscow* Hamlet, 158.

[34] Senelick, *Gordon Craig's Moscow* Hamlet, 151-52.

[35] See a sketch marked "Projet pour Hamlet, 1904" published in Arnott, *Edward Gordon Craig and Hamlet,* 20, in which the Hamlet figure wears a long robe.

[36] Craig's initial idea was that Hamlet's death-wish would be personified and follow him around, drawing nearer during moments like "To be or not to be," but Stanislavski vetoed this.

wearing a long, narrow tunic similar to the finished costume, although the actual garment's ornamentation is not present in the black figure. While producer Nemirovich-Danchenko described this "narrow, long" costume as "Not what people expect in 'Hamlet,'"[37] it would not have been so unexpected for Craig: it recalls the depiction of Hamlet in a cassock by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1858), a painting Craig likely knew well.[38] The choice of color – "grayish blue" with darker accents, instead of the sable

Fig. 29: Hamlet and daemon "black figure"

Fig. 30: Kachalov as Hamlet at the MAT

[37] Quoted in Senelick, *Gordon Craig's Moscow* Hamlet, 123.

[38] Craig's mother, Ellen Terry, was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement (her first marriage was to G.F. Watts). Although she never sat for Rossetti, they were part of the same social circle.

specified in the text[39] – links the garment to earlier French Symbolist theatre, which often used costumes "divorced from the colors of real objects… they tended towards veiled 'mood' colors, or at least a palette limited to blue, grey, and brown tones."[40]

In this costume and numerous others, a sculptural effect is created through the use of heavy, simply-cut garments, which often hang to the floor (Claudius, Gertrude and Ophelia all have floor-length robes in both Craig's black figures and in photographs). The ornamentation on the garment and the medallion (carved by Craig himself), however, recall the heavy, flat outlines of the black figures.

Fig. 31: Claudius and Gertrude at the MAT

[39] Senelick, *Gordon Craig's Moscow* Hamlet, 157.

[40] Rischbieter, *Art and the stage in the 20th century,* 12.

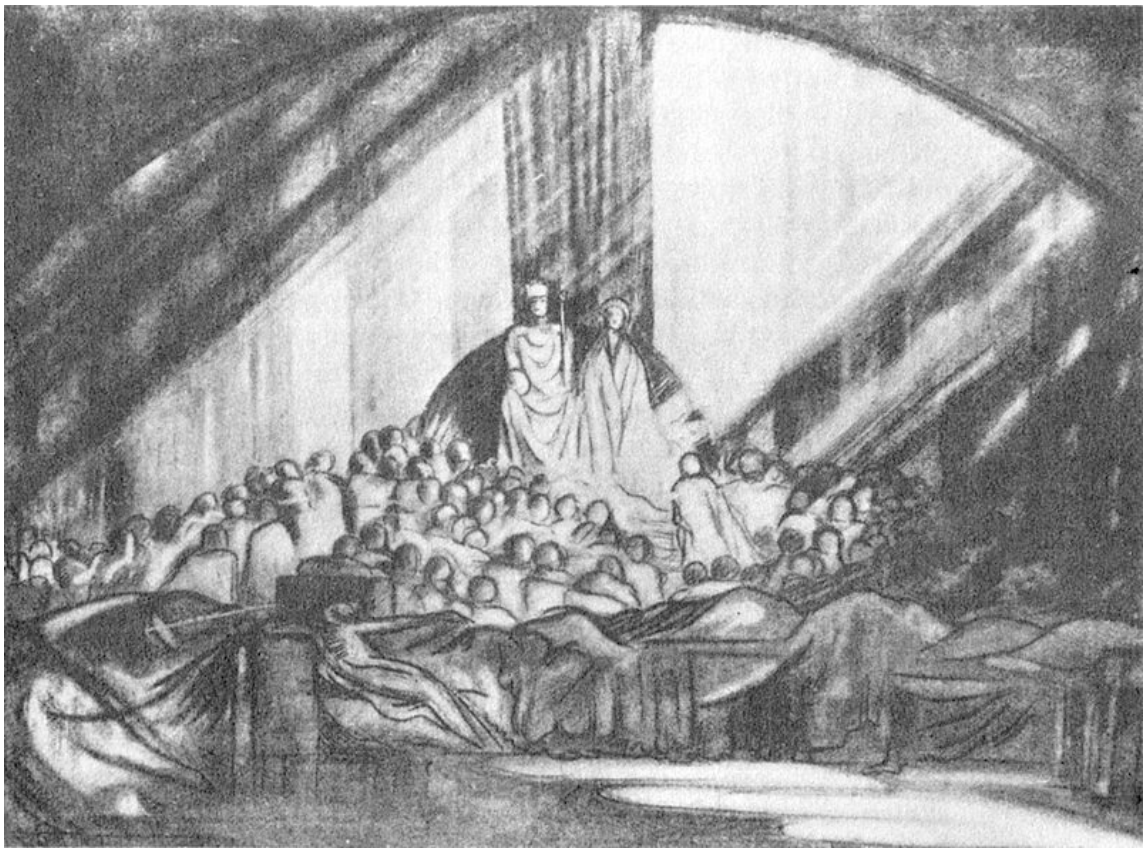

Fig. 32: Craig's sketch for Act I, scene ii

This three-dimensional presence extends to Craig's grouping of the costumes together – in the striking court scene (I.ii.), he creates a tableau in which the King and Queen's cloaks flow over the assembled courtiers, melding all the figures into one fabric sculpture (except, of course, Hamlet in the foreground). Costumes become architecture in this scene, creating the space with fabric and making the bodies disappear into the set. Something similar happens in the last moment of the play, when the huge banners of the victorious army are laid down and draped over the bodies of Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius and Gertrude, which lie on some steps center stage; here, the bodies become indistinct from each other and from the architecture. (Craig felt that the realization of these two scenes, along with the Mousetrap, most closely expressed his vision.[41])

[41] Senelick, *Gordon Craig's Moscow* Hamlet, 158.

Fig 33: Photo of the final tableau

This last scene, however, also shows an interesting flatness. In the final tableau, Fortinbras appears in what Senelick describes as "archangelic guise": a flat halo attached at the back of his costume, echoed by a large circle, superimposed over a cross, decorating the center of his long straight tunic.[42] These images are repeated by the sword held up to form a cross, center stage, and the circular shield on stage left. These elements are reminiscent of Russian icon painting, with its painterly stylization and two-dimensionality. Ornamentation motifs on the costumes – Hamlet's tunic in particular – could also be also read as suggesting a kind of stylized traditional Russianness, very similar to the aesthetic that the Ballets Russes popularized in Western Europe. This tension or conversation between sculptural effect and stylized flatness comes directly

[42] Senelick, *Gordon Craig's Moscow* Hamlet, 172 (caption).

from Craig's working models: what the black figures offer, like tradition Russian icons and Leon Bakst's designs for the nymphs of *Faune*, is not depth – there is rarely shading – but a two-dimensional *representation* of three-dimensionality, communicated in the heavy lines indicating folds of fabric.

Pablo Picasso: *Parade*

The ballet *Parade* represents perhaps an even more radical investigation of the relationship between costume, set, and body. Premiered on May 18, 1917, with a scenario by Jean Cocteau, choreography by Leonide Massine, music by Erik Satie, and design by Pablo Picasso, the ballet was identified from the beginning with avant-garde art. For Garafola and many other scholars, *Parade* represents a tipping point in the importance of design: "Design, in fact, now took the place of music as the center of gravity in a production… Massine, in 1919, put the designer's case more strongly. He believed that in the new ballet's synthesis of movement and form, choreography and plastic art, 'the two essentials would be balanced with an inclination toward the plastic element.'"[43] For Rischbieter, *Parade* "inaugurated what should be called 'painters theatre': a theatre which was always negatively defined... As a theatre whose center point was no longer man, the actor, expressing himself through speech and mine, nor the dancer as the teller of a story or the focus of emotion."[44] Though this was a common perception of "painters' theatre," Picasso's designs for *Parade* challenge this definition

[43] Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes,* 84. The internal quote is from Massine's article "On Choreography and A New School of Dancing" in *Drama* [London] 1:3 (Dec 1919): 69.

[44] Rischbieter, *Art and the stage in the 20th century*, 12.

by paying a surprising amount of attention to the dancers' bodies, centering the expressive actor in the drama in a different but powerful way.

Robert Hansen writes that "Picasso's designs for *Parade* were the most radical expression of cubism realized on the stage."[45] This widely-held opinion of *Parade* as the pinnacle of Modern painterly abstraction onstage stems mainly from two controversial costumes, for the French Manager and American Manager – created as wearable sculptures of wood and cardboard, they were almost ten feet tall when worn, completely concealing the dancers' bodies and greatly limiting their movement. Deborah Menaker Rothschild's excellent description is worth quoting at length, since extant photos can be difficult to decipher:

> [The American Manager] encapsulated the artist's and Cocteau's notion of a country they had never seen. It was a notion derived largely from cinemas and advertising, which combined stereotypes of the rural West and the urban East. The American Manager sports cowboy chaps, a cowcatcher, and an oversized bullet holster vest, as well as a skyscraper complete with smoking chimney…[46]
>
> By contrast the French Manager epitomized the haughty elegance of a cosmopolitan dandy, complete with the tree-lined boulevard along which he might stroll, attached magnate-like to his back. In black top hat, tie and tails, a ballet master's baton in his hand, he was a thinly disguised caricature of Diaghilev - the facial division into black and white a reference to the impresario's distinguishing streak of white hair.[47]

In the program note for the premiere, Guillaume Apollinaire wrote that the *Parade* design "is a question, above all, of translating reality. However, the subject is no longer reproduced but merely represented; indeed, rather than represented, it is to be

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[45] Hansen, *Scenic and Costume Designs for the Ballets Russes***,** 59.

[46] Deborah Menaker Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade: from street to stage* (London: Sotheby's publications, 1991), 167.

[47] Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade,* 171.

Fig. 33: French Manager

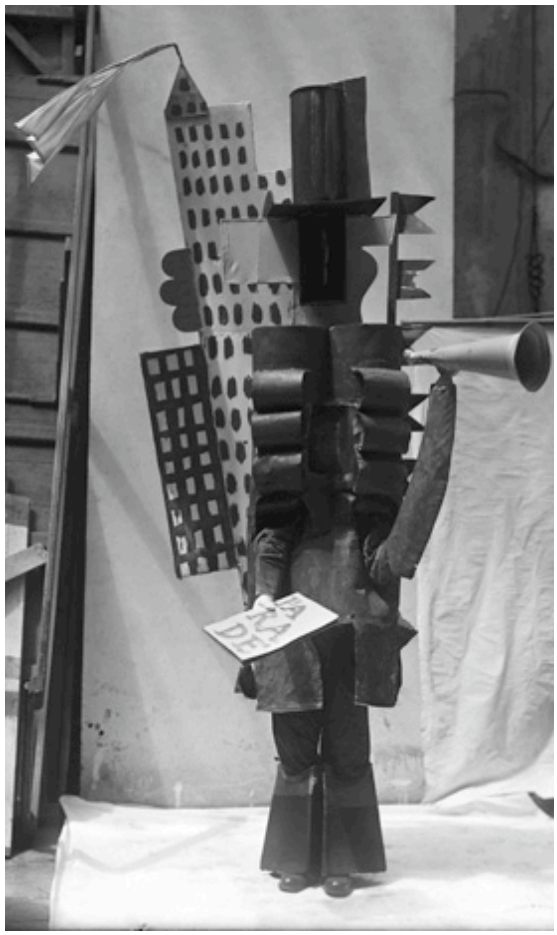

Fig. 34: American Manager

suggested."[48] Though he famously identified the style of *Parade* as "sur-réalisme" in closing,[49] this use of the word "suggested" has a strong association with Symbolism, where the audience would be able to intuit a higher truth through the images. Art historian Werner Spies goes a step further, viewing Picasso's scenography in *Parade* as a kind of visual writing: "Picasso's stage picture is no longer a picture in the traditional sense: it is a script, a kind of pictorial transparency that has to be read by the spectator."[50]

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[48] "Parade and the New Spirit" (1917), quoted in Rischbieter, *Art and the stage in the 20th century,* 83.

[49] Quoted in Martha Schmoyer LoMonaco, "The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle: Robert Joffrey Reconstructs 'Parade,'" *The Drama Review: TDR*, 28:3 (Autumn 1984): 32.

[50] In Rischbieter, *Art and the stage in the 20th century,* 82.

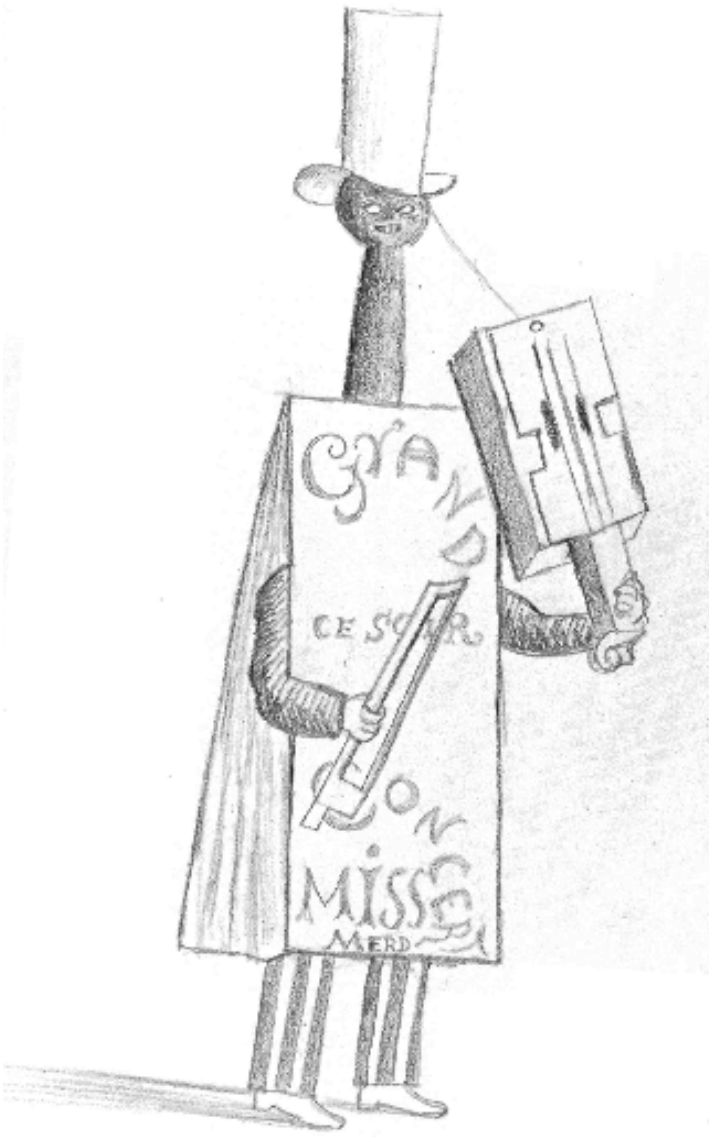

Fig. 35: preliminary manager sketch

As Spies may have known, these costumes were, in fact, substitutes for text: Cocteau originally wanted offstage spoken words invoking a carnival barker's pitch, as well as sounds such as a typewriter and an airplane taking off, but Satie and Diaghilev did not like the idea of interpolating spoken text and other noises into the ballet. Picasso

came up with the idea to create Manager characters (not present in Cocteau's original scenario) who would represent advertising and commercialism.[51] In Picasso's first preparatory sketches of the Managers, they wear sandwich boards with writing on them. According to a contemporary article, Picasso convinced his colleagues of "how effective it would be to exploit the contrast between three characters as 'real' as pasted 'chromos' in a canvas and the more solemnly transposed unhuman [sic], or superhuman, characters who would become in fact the false reality on stage, to the point of reducing the real

Fig. 36: The Managers, reconstructed by Kermit Love for the Joffrey Ballet's 1973 remounting[52]

[51] Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade,* 132-133.

[52] Love reconstructed the Managers from black-and-white photos, relying on accounts from surviving production members (such as choreographer Massine) for color. See "Picasso Ballet Constructions Recreated" in *MoMA* No.15 (Summer, 1980): 1.

dancers to the stature of puppets."[53] Kenneth Silver points out this contrast between costume styles, arguing that "at least as important as the Cubist qualities of the ballet are the non-Cubist, and largely traditional, aspects of *Parade*, not only Picasso's designs for the costumes of the Chinese Magician, the Acrobats, and the Little American Girl, but also that of the great painted overture curtain."[54] The strongest contrast to the Managers is probably the Little American Girl, for whom "There was never a costume sketch because Picasso took Chabelska [the dancer] shopping in Paris to buy the navy blue

Fig. 37: The Little American Girl

Fig. 38: The Chinese Conjurer

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[53] Douglas Cooper, *Picasso Theatre* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1967), 21. This direct quote is cited only as "*Nord-Sud,"* a Cubist review founded by poet Pierre Reverdy. By "as 'real' as pasted 'chromos,'" the writer probably refers to the technique of chromolithography, a method of color printing developed in the nineteenth century and often used in advertising. The implied image, I believe, is of a color poster pasted to the side of a building – i.e., the realistic characters look like "real" advertising.

[54] Kenneth Silver, "Jean Cocteau and the *Image d'Epinal*: an essay on realism and naïveté," in *Jean Cocteau and the French Scene,* ed. Daniel Abadie (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984): 89.

middy, pleated white skirt and large white bow to wear in her hair."[55] Her many choreographic film references (such as her Charlie Chaplin shuffle) are underscored by the cinematic realism of her costume, in stark contrast to the "suggestive" abstraction of the Managers. Bakst noted this division of the *Parade* costumes, which he saw as "one group true to outer reality, the others creatures of Picasso's fantasy."[56] The interesting thing about this observation is that, diegetically, the inside/outside positions are reversed: in the scenario of the ballet, the Managers are outside of a theatre, trying to get passers-by to enter, while the performers wait inside (and make brief appearances outside as advertisements for the show). But it is the outside characters (the Managers) who are costumed fantastically, while the inside characters (the performers) wear garments "true to outer reality."

Picasso's investigation of the relationship between these two groups (and their respective relations to illusion and reality) takes on another level with the costume for the third "Negro" Manager, which didn't quite make it into the premiere. Picasso designed a third manager figure as a horse costume/sculpture, built for two performers (under the apparatus) and ridden by "a dummy of a Manager in blackface and evening dress... modeled on blackface cakewalk dancers"; however, the rider puppet kept falling over and was cut in the dress rehearsal, leaving the horse to do a short solo dance, without music, at the premiere.[57] Since there wasn't any music to fill, it seems significant that the horse was retained even when the Manager dummy didn't work out, indicating that it had a

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[55] LoMonaco, "The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle: Robert Joffrey Reconstructs 'Parade,'" 40.

[56] Quoted in Rischbieter, *Art and the stage in the 20th century,* 46; written 1917.

[57] Cooper, *Picasso Theatre,* 26.

more important function in the ballet than simply as a gag bit (many accounts say that it was very funny). There is a horse and rider (or more specifically, a unicorn with a winged fairy standing on its back) on the painted backdrop; by juxtaposing this painted image with the horseback manager, Picasso showed a duplicate figure in two versus three dimensions. The painted horse/horseback manager serves to focus the audience's attention on the contrast between flat (painted) and plastic (sculptural) forms onstage.

The differences between two and three dimensionality and between abstract and realist costumes point to the central investigation undertaken by these designs – the exploration of costume on/as body, especially a body in motion.[58] The costumes were criticized for their restriction of the dancing, but there is evidence that this was deliberate and worked out to support the kind of motion that Picasso's collaborators wanted: in Massine's memoir, he recalls choreographing the French manager's movement in a "jerky, staccato manner to match Satie's" music.[59] Apollinaire argued in the program note that "The fantastic constructions that constitute those gigantic and unexpected figures, the Managers - far from being an obstacle to Massine's imagination - have given him, if we may so express it, greater freedom of movement."[60] Picasso was fascinated by the

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[58] Many art historians note a similar fascination in Picasso's painting, which Jean Boggs believes was developed through his stage work, arguing that in Picasso's early drawings of figures from the circus or *commedia dell'arte*, performers are "seemingly transformed into a painter's symbols… and have nothing of that suggestion of the dichotomy in the theatre between the actor and his role, or reality and illusion, which was to fascinate Picasso when he accepted Cocteau's invitation to work for Diaghilev's company in 1916. His clowns gradually became actors, their costumes separate from their bodies… their personalities occasionally different from the roles they play." Jean S. Boggs, "'Picasso and the Theatre' at Toulouse," in *The Burlington Magazine* 108:754 (Jan 1966): 53.

[59] Quoted in LoMonaco, "The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle: Robert Joffrey Reconstructs 'Parade,'" 34.

[60] Quoted and translated in Rischbieter, *Art and the stage in the 20th century,* 83.

interplay of movement and costume, and "understood that costume needed to be designed so that dancers' movements would produce visual changes to patterns and fabrics."[61] He "watched the dancers practicing, he attended rehearsals not only of *Parade* but also of other ballets in the repertory,"[62] and at least in some cases, this observation "help[ed] him determine the cut of the costumes."[63] Picasso's many preparatory sketches for Parade "document how carefully Picasso thought out... the way a dancer would fit inside the construction," especially in the case of the Managers.[64] For the Female Acrobat's

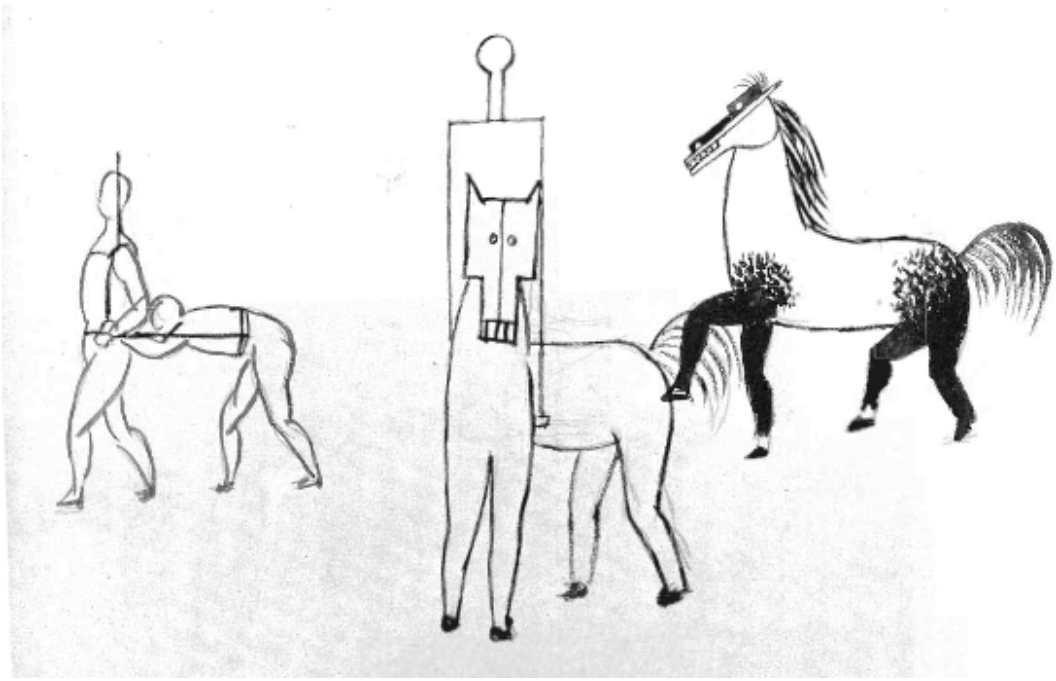

Fig. 40: Picasso's preliminary sketches for the Horseback Manager

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[61] Marilyn McCully, "Picasso: Classicism and the Theatre," *The Burlington Magazine*, 139:1128 (Mar., 1997): 220.

[62] Cooper, *Picasso Theatre,* 26.

[63] James Beechey and Richard Shone, "Picasso in London, 1919: The Première of 'The Three-Cornered Hat,'" *The Burlington Magazine,* 148:1243 (Oct., 2006): 673. They are speaking specifically of Picasso's process for his second Ballets Russes collaboration, *Le Tricorne* in 1919, but it seems probable that observing the dancers for *Parade* would have influenced his thoughts on costume.

[64] Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade,* 165.

costume, he painted the "design of blue lines and whorls directly onto the white tights which [dancer] Lopokova was wearing,"[65] in a fusion of skin and costume which recalls Bakst's faun. Taken together, Picasso's two different kinds of designs for *Parade* mark out the two extremes of actor/costume fusion – from the obliteration of the performers and restriction of almost all their movement (the Managers) to the costume as merely an enhancement of the performer's skin (the Acrobats). The duplication of the horseback manager and the painted horse on the backdrop suggests an even more radical option: costume without body at all.

Costumes as communication: speech, music, writing

While they seem to have much in common, Craig was a harsh critic of the Ballets Russes, and he opposed the practice of importing visual artists (whom he and others referred to dismissively as "easel painters") to design for the stage; problems with the body and costume were key to his critique. In 1913, he wrote in *The Mask* that "The Russian Ballet is essentially the 'Art' which is created by the Body. Its perfection is physical. Its appeal is to our senses, not through them. Having excited them it has done its task. It makes no further effort. It is sensuous art and not spiritual."[66] Here, Craig seems to be attacking the Ballets Russes on the grounds that they are only about surfaces: appealing "to our senses, not through them," unlike theatrical Symbolism, which used a precise configuration of material elements to access a higher plane of metaphysical meaning. Craig's point is elucidated by his comments on Bakst's costumes for women in

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[65] Cooper, *Picasso Theatre,* 26.

[66] Edward Gordon Craig, "The Russian Ballet," in *The Mask* 6:1 ([month missing], 1913): 8.

an earlier article: "Bakst is ugly because of his clumsy sense of the sensual. All his women (and he is never tired of putting them before the public), are drugged and in a kind of sofa orgy. They seem to hate ecstasy and they adore a good wriggle. The costumes he puts them into are mute; they want to speak and cannot."[67] For Craig, the sensuous material body (especially the female body) muffles the expression of the costume, which cannot "speak" its higher truth over the loudness of the body. The themes Craig raises here – the material body and/as the sign, perception through the senses, visual images as communication or speech – recall the preoccupations of theatrical Symbolism a generation earlier. Craig's use of the model of speech draws attention to the double importance of surface and depth in costume design – as metaphors, in understanding how or what costumes *mean*.

Bakst also thought of costumes as communicative, but rather than Craig's speech metaphor, he used the language of music. In 1915 he told the journal *The Craftsman*:

> I have often noticed that in each color of the prism there exists a graduation, which sometimes expresses frankness and chastity, sometimes sensuality and bestiality, sometimes pride, and sometimes despair. This can be felt and given over to the public by the effect one makes of the various shadings… The painter who knows how to make use of this, the director of the orchestra who can put with one movement of his baton all this in motion, without crossing them, who can let flow the thousand tones from the end of his stick without making a mistake, can draw from the spectator the exact emotion he wants him to feel.[68]

Bakst's emphasis is on emotion – even emotional manipulation – rather than information; music rather than speech. While Craig thought that Bakst's costumes "appeal… to our senses, not through them," Bakst is here suggesting that he attempted to go through the

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[67] John Balance, "Kleptomania, or the Russian Theatre," in *The Mask* 4:1 (October 1911): 99.

[68] *The Craftsman* 29 (1915), quoted in Charles Mayer, "The Theatrical Designs of Leon Bakst" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1977), 182.

senses, not to the viewer's intellect, but to an emotional response. As his designs for *Faune* suggest, Bakst may have been more interested than Craig in surface pleasure or emotion which existed for its own sake, rather than in making a larger theoretical point. This music metaphor recalls Symbolism in a different way (with its fascination with Richard Wagner), but Bakst doesn't seem to share their anxiety about the material body. Picasso's designs for *Parade* offer a third model of communication, subtly different from both Craig's speech and Bakst's music: costume and/as writing. Picasso's preliminary sketches of the managers wearing stiff sandwichboards with writing on them offers perhaps the ultimate reduction of costume to text. His juxtaposition of the Horse Manager costume onstage with the painted equine on the backdrop offers the final Symbolist (and Wagnerian) fantasy: costumes without bodies.

Focusing on the costume design reveals that the opposition between Craig and the Ballets Russes is not necessarily one of actual dimensionality on the stage, or even one of content – since all three designers used costumes to communicate ideas and comment upon productions – but rather one of mode. Although Craig conceived of costumes' purpose slightly differently than Bakst and Picasso, all three designers used costume to communicate something about overall production and to shape the spectator's experience of it. I argue that both of these perspectives influence costume design of the early twentieth century, what is often called the New Stagecraft. All three modes seem to fit Roland Barthes' 1955 proscription for good costume design: "the costume must be an argument… costume had a powerful semantic value; it was not there only to be seen, it

was also there to be *read*, it communicated ideas, information, or sentiments."[69] In addition, they do this outside of realism: the three share what early-twentieth-century critics called "stylization," or abstraction. The play between flat and three-dimensional elements, both literal and metaphorical, is a key part of this style; as Robert Edmond Jones neatly summed it up, design after the turn of the nineteenth century is about "not illusion, but allusion."[70]

For Kenneth MacGowan, writing in 1921, Bakst's emotional qualities were important to the New Stagecraft movement, even though he used techniques of an older style, "principally because of his fidelity to the inner emotion of the plays and ballets he decorates, and the vigor with which his line and his color express their atmosphere."[71] This expression of "inner emotion", even if it does not rise to the level of speech, seems to satisfy MacGowan that Bakst deserves a place in the New Stagecraft: Bakst's designs are "true to the ideals of the newer theatre. They do not merely exaggerate perspective, they exaggerate perspective in such a way as to convey an emotional sense of the play's or the ballet's meaning."[72]

Rather than marking out opposing positions, I suggest that the costume designs of the "old" painterly tradition and of the "new" plastic scenography work together to shape the unfolding trends of costume in the early twentieth century. In terms of artistic content of the designs, they all focus attention on the relationship of the costume to the body, and

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[69] Barthes, "The Diseases of Costume," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 46. First published in 1955 in *Théâtre Populaire*.

[70] Robert Edmond Jones, *The Dramatic Imagination: reflections and speculations on the art of the theatre* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941) 136.

[71] Kenneth MacGowan, *The Theatre of Tomorrow* (New York: Bini and Liveright, 1921), 70.

[72] MacGowan, *The Theatre of Tomorrow*, 71.

on different ways of seeing the costume/body as a moving part of the set. For both camps, the costume sketch became newly important, in a further twist of the flat/plastic divide. Craig attacked Bakst for discrepancies between sketch and finished costume, accusing Bakst of caring more about the fine art drawing than the theatre object,[73] but Craig himself also privileged costume renderings. Often, he published or exhibited his sketches as items in their own right even when not part of a real production; his and other books of collected costume designs began to appear in the teens and twenties.[74] This importance placed on the rendering itself can be seen as further inheritance from Symbolism: the sketch alone allows a focus on pure design, as art, separate from the materiality of the performer's body or the craft of creating the actual garment. The apotheosis of the sketch also worked to further divorce the art of costume design from its craft – sewing – which none of these designers practiced in a serious way. Together, Craig and the Ballets Russes resulted in the growth of a new kind of specialized professional costume designer, as an artist rather than a seamstress, who expressed an "argument" in his/her work.

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[73] Balance (aka Craig), "Kleptomania, or the Russian Theatre," 100.

[74] Besides Craig's book, *Towards a New Theatre*, see for example Mrs. [Eliza Davis] Aria, *Costume: fanciful, historical, and theatrical* (London, Macmillan and co., ltd., 1906); Robert Mason, *Robes of Thespis; costume designs by modern artists* (London: E. Benn Ltd., 1928).

Annie Holt
Conclusion

In his influential 1941 memoir-cum-manifesto, *The Dramatic Imagination*, designer Robert Edmond Jones asks us to keep the "two essentials of stage costume in mind – theatricality and appropriateness."[1] By this he means, first, that stage costumes are different from offstage garments, and second, that each stage costume must be specifically designed for "*that* character, in *that* scene, in *that* play."[2] "Reading Costume Design" traces the development of this Modernist opinion of costumes and their meaning (one which still has broad currency on Euro-American stages today). The four chapters of this dissertation offer ways of thinking about how and why a certain costume is "theatrical" and/or "appropriate" – and about how these perceptions are historically specific.

During the period 1850-1920, I argue, on-stage garments became more central to the theatrical experience, for theatre-makers, performers and audiences alike. Extending the work of earlier actor-managers, the new visionary directors of this period experimented with the role of costumes in the unified stage picture. Directors' interests often centered on the kinds of truths costumes could tell, whether delving into historical accuracy or realism, or using more stylized garments to support an abstract artistic vision or "world of the play." Performers expanded stage garments' ability to represent multiple simultaneous fictions – about the character and/or about the performer herself – telling a story both inside and outside of the diegesis. Audiences played with the ways that they

[1] Robert Edmond Jones, *The Dramatic Imagination: reflections and speculations on the art of the theatre* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), 95.

[2] Jones, *The Dramatic Imagination,* 93.

could enter these fictions, as the rise of haute couture challenged the boundaries between street clothing and costume, perhaps offering customers the chance to become characters of a sort. Theatre artists – most not quite yet identifying as designers – explored the possibilities of "looking at" and "looking through" costumes, creating a productive tension between surface and depth, or the mechanics and poetics of costume design. Costumes became an important vehicle for art, ideas, and enjoyment within the performance experience – sometimes even attracting audiences for their own sake.

Jones goes on to say that after the inventions of photography and film, in theatre "what we are now interested in, however, is not illusion, but allusion."[3] This turn towards "allusion," I argue, is one of the defining characteristics of Modern costume design. In the case studies examined here, this shift from illusion to allusion is expressed variously as "artistic truth," "translation," or "stylization," all pointing towards costumes' function as an interpretive part of the overall theatrical experience. In my reading, Jones' term "allusion" can be extended, summing up a certain stylistic abstraction dating from around the turn of the nineteenth century, but also encompassing a shifting relationship between the costume and the actor's body, and between the costume and the audience's garments or bodies. That is to say, costumes allude to historical or artistic references, certainly, and after about 1900 designers often choose this mode of allusion rather than photo-realistic representation. However, costumes also allude to actors, to each other, and to the audience.

"Reading Costume Design" shows artists and audiences of this period engaged in deep thinking about what is represented by a garment on stage. The actor's interpretation

[3] Jones, *The Dramatic Imagination,* 136.

of character, the director's vision for the play, the audience member's own taste as a consumer, all become available as "readings" of the costume. This happens, I suggest, because of the way that costume design becomes art. Costumes enter into several kinds of productive engagements with fine art in my case studies – costumes appear in paintings, costumes are exhibited in the art gallery, costumes become the surfaces for painting or the materials for sculpture by established artists. Larger trends within Modernism play a role here as well: interest in the individual creative consciousness of the artist, and in recouping certain kinds of artisanal crafts as valuable artistic endeavor, work to raise the profile of costume design and the costume designer. I suggest that we view these two developments – the perception of costume as art and the ability of costumes to communicate multiple meanings – as fueling each other in a positive feedback loop. The more costumes become artistic objects, the more worthy of interpretation they are, the more "readings" or significance they can carry, the more they are perceived as art.

It is through this dense network of allusions – within, between, and outside the stage itself – that this project uses costume design to trace an alternative genealogy of Modern theatre, one centered around images rather than around literary texts, actors or directors. In addition, my dissertation widens Jones' focus on theatrical allusiveness to include opera and dance as well; although of course each genre has its own nuances and conventions, I suggest that we can use costume to look at the performing arts together in new ways. Costumes may reveal new thematic, formal and aesthetic relationships between theatre, opera and dance. "Reading Costume Design" proposes costumes as a new site in which to read allusions and connections important to our discipline: between different productions in time and across the different branches of the performing arts.

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